

THE BIBLE AS RECORD, WITNESS AND MEDIUM

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No segment of contemporary Christendom has been able to escape the haunting question, "In what sense is the Bible the Word of God?" This is a rather new problem. Before the nineteenth century of our era it would hardly have occurred to any one even to raise the issue. The answer to the query seemed to be selfevident.

Until the middle of the last century the main body of Bible readers remained undisturbed in their conviction that somehow the Scriptures of the church were so unique, not only in their content and form but also in terms of their origin, that, for all practical purposes, it was hardly necessary to be concerned with the historic circumstances surrounding the creative persons and forces that went into the making of the individual Biblical documents. Christians generally thought of their Bible as springing almost full-grown from a single inspired session of the various sacred authors.

Occasionally, to be sure, there was a passing reference to possible research and investigation on the part of one or the other writer. Just as a case in point, in the middle of the seventeenth century, Johann Konrad Dannhauer, used the special term aspiratio for this aspect of the total divine action which caused the Scriptures to be written. (1) But no one had as yet suggested that the Pentateuch might owe its contents to various documentary sources and/or to the oral traditions of a religious community. The Bible was conceived to be God's Word in the sense that its separate parts had come into being very directly and uniquely by a special impulse of the Holy Spirit working on and with each author, transporting him to some timeless mountain to from which it was possible to view, even if but for a moment, the promised land of heavenly mysteries. It was obvious, of course, that the Spirit had not destroyed the personality of the individual author. No responsible theologian really thought of inspiration as a purely mechanical process. And yet the Scriptural documents were studied as though they had come into being in an almost complete historical and literary vacuum. In point of fact some theologians were willing to go so far as to say that the Scriptures, because of their inspired nature, could contain neither anakolutha nor solecisms, that the koine of the New Testament for example, was a special "language of the Holy Ghost." (2) The only virtue in such a point of view is its utter consistency with a basic assumption that is completely false.

Here, too, the age of the Enlightenment challenged the easy assumptions of previous centuries. To be sure, at first the rationalistic approach of the eighteenth century left the main stream of Biblical scholarship unaffected. However, in subsequent years various archaeological discoveries helped to illumine the life and times of Biblical antiquity. Documents from religions practiced outside of but contemporary with the life and worship of ancient Israel established the degree to which Old Testament concepts were not only different from but similar to those of other Near Eastern cultures. Moreover, the science of philology made it possible to determine various stages and periods in the development of the Hebrew and Greek languages. All of this new knowledge added to a growing awareness that in many respects the church's Scriptures were to a large degree quite human books, and that they had come into being in contact with, rather than in isolation from, the total religious and intellectual milieu of the ancient Near East, in the instance of the Old Testament, and of the Graeco-Roman world, in the case of the New.

Something of a milestone in the field of Biblical interpretation was reached in 1860. In that year six Anglican clergymen published a volume entitled Essays and Reviews. In it they very frankly conceded many points to the critical ideas that had been advocated in Germany for some decades previously. Immediately John William Burgon, Dean of Chichester, and the champion of a long series of lost cases, countered this new approach with a book of his own, known as Inspiration and Interpretation. He made no concessions of any kind to the new ideas. The battle was joined. The Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy was on, confronting the church with the most serious test it has had to face in its history. The conflict began to embroil American church life toward the end of the nineteenth and especially in the early decades of the twentieth century.

As one might expect, neither side in this acrimonious debate was completely right. This much is generally conceded today. By now both extremes have moved somewhat nearer the center of the discussion. As a consequence there has, on the one hand, developed a greater sense of reverence for the Scriptures among those who would reckon themselves to be the descendants of liberalism. Fundamentalism helped to keep alive this necessary and wholesome emphasis on the attitude of reverence required of anyone who handled the Scriptures. On the other side, even extremely conservative Bible students and interpreters hardly hesitate to concede today that many human factors, beyond those of the literary style and intellectual acumen of the individual sacred author, must be taken into account for any proper understanding and appreciation of the Bible. This awareness of the infinite complexity involved in Biblical interpretation is liberalism's finest contribution to this whole field of investigation. (3)

Out of this mutual respect there has come about a growing consensus that the Bible is in essence a uniquely inspired account of those events in the sacred past by which God proposes to communicate even now with us who are His creatures and children. This insight constitutes a great gain for the art of Biblical interpretation. It has brought to light a dimension in the Scriptural documents that had previously been noticed only in rare moments of special illumination by individual giants such as Martin Luther. (4) We may, therefore, confidently speak of the Bible as the record of and witness to the saving will and redemptive activity of God. It is in this way that the Scriptures serve as a medium of revelation in every generation.

Now, "revelation" is a term used for both the fact and the method by which God makes Himself known to men. The word itself, however, is not to be thought of as a purely theological concept. It has some philosophical overtones, derived from the whole question as to the limits and validity of human knowledge. (5) The Scriptures themselves do not raise this particular issue as a problem in epistemology but rather as an aspect of our existence. In their view, man cannot discover God by any devices of his own. God must disclose Himself if there is to be any knowledge of Him. God is never an inference from anything for any Biblical author; He is always the initiator. In one sense, of course, He is the object of human understanding and faith, but to a much greater degree God always remains the subject of revelation. We know Him only as we are known by Him. (6) It may be useful, therefore, at this point to consider the whole concept of revelation as we meet it in our sacred Scriptures.

This kind of approach to the problem begins by conceding the existence of what is at times referred to as the first hermeneutical circle. This implies that there is no way in which any document can be interpreted properly from the outside. Any interpreter, whether he works with a modern legal brief or with an ancient Homeric poem, must take the material under study on its own terms. This applies to the art of Biblical interpretation to an even greater degree because the categories and dimensions employed by the sacred writers are beyond the reach of ordinary

experience. The procedure of analyzing the concept of revelation as it is used and described within the frame of reference created by the Scriptures themselves should, therefore, provide some assurance of adequacy rather than constituting a source of embarrassment. No apologies are necessary for working within this circle, particularly in view of the Biblical insistence that the revelation of which it is the record and to which it testifies is so absolute that there is no external test by which it can be either validated or authenticated. There is, in fact, no criterion apart from revelation itself by which it can be evaluated.

I. The Concept of Revelation

The Biblical contribution to the philosophical inquiry concerning the limits of man's cognitive faculty is its insistence that in those things of God which really matter man can only be ignorant. For He is a God that "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6,16) There is no way of bridging the deep chasm between men as creatures and God as their creator except on the initiative of the latter. "Truly," said the prophet, "Thou art a God who hidest Thyself" (Is. 45,15). It is obvious, therefore, that in this kind of context the term "revelation" occurs in a much more profound sense than in such a purely secular announcement as might well appear in our daily newspapers, "Today the White House revealed that a committee of experts had been appointed to consider certain matters of vital concern to the nation." In both instances, however, the idea at the very heart of the concept is that of disclosure rather than of discovery.

From the Biblical point of view, then, revelation is a term to remind us of the limitations placed on our ability to know God or anything about Him. We cannot know Him; He must disclose Himself to us. The Scriptures move on, however, to assert that we have not been left in ignorance, but that God has revealed Himself to men, not in His absolute essence, to be sure, but in terms of a personal relationship to specific persons and to a particular people at certain moments in history. In fact, the greatest revelation we have of God is His Son, born as a descendant of the house of David, but known as the Logos for the reason that He is the principal instrument of God's disclosure of Himself. "No man has seen God at any time," the fourth evangelist has Jesus saying "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." (John 1,18)

For any attempt to interpret the Scriptures, an awareness of the fact that God never ceases to be the subject of revelation is of extreme significance. For this implies that we must expect nothing less than a confrontation with God Himself as we study and expound the record of His redemptive activity. Any other kind of knowledge of God is to revelation as chaff is to wheat. (7) Our abiding responsibility in Biblical interpretation, therefore, is to proceed beyond the analysis of verbal propositions and conceptual images to that of listening in obedience to God's claims on us as they sound forth from the events recorded in and witnessed to in the Biblical documents. This means that the ultimate dimension of truth as it applies to us in our relationship with God is not to be found in the formulations of Scripture but in the actions of God described and interpreted there. In a very urgent sense, therefore, the art of interpretation requires ears to hear, lest we hear and understand not. For it is always possible to believe every statement made in the Scriptures without actually confronting the truth they propose to communicate.

In this connection it will be useful to have a look at some of the phrases and words used by the sacred authors as they take cognizance of this whole matter of revelation. We

shall begin with the Old Testament; and, after we have considered a few of the more significant Old Testament expressions, we shall proceed to an analysis of some of the crucial terms used in the New for the fact and process of God's self-disclosure.

It is not a simple matter to set forth what the Old Testament teaches on the subject of revelation. It assumes, of course, that men are in contact with God only where He Himself has broken in to offer Himself in communion. Whatever men get to know of God in this way, however, always remains fragmentary. At no time did God manifest Himself in His full majesty. His celestial splendor remained hidden even when He appeared in a bright cloud. For, as the Deuteronomic writer puts it, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God," even though, as he adds, "the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." (Dt. 29, 28)

At one point, we are told, Moses was not quite content to have only God's revealed presence attend Israel through the desert. The Hebrew of Exodus chapter 33 uses the word "face" for God's presence at this point. This noun suggests that God dealt as a person with men as persons on these occasions when He revealed Himself. It implies, moreover, that God disclosed only so much of His being as He chose to make visible or audible in a particular situation.

Moses was not satisfied with this kind of manifestation. He asked for more. In fact, he was bold enough to request the privilege of seeing God in His full splendor. This privilege, however, was denied him on the grounds that no human being can at any time see God in His absolute majesty and still live.

Yet Moses was given the privilege of seeing the Lord's goodness pass in review. That is to say, Israel's great leader was given a glimpse of all the mercy and grace God had in store for His people. This is the Biblical way of describing God as revealing Himself in those historic events which occurred to implement God's redemptive will and purpose for Israel. In these acts God's transcendence became imminent. In them we can see God, but only His back parts, as the Exodus account has it. (8)

Some years before this the angel of the Lord had appeared to Moses, as we read, in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. On that occasion God had revealed His Name as being "I Am That I Am," rendered in the Septuagint by a masculine participle as "I am the (personally) existent One." This almost untranslatable Hebrew imperfect may also be rendered as "I Will be That I will Be." It is an open tense, so to speak, suggesting that even though God chose to disclose Himself at particular moments in specific places, yet, unlike the deities of other nations, He was bound neither to time nor to place. He is the God not only of Mount Sinai, but also of Mount Nebo and Mount Zion--and of Calvary, for that matter. He is the God of Moses and of Joshua even as he had been Abraham's Lord.

This abiding transcendence of God is brought out most clearly in the opening words of the speech Solomon delivered at the dedication of the Temple as a place for God "to dwell in forever." (1 Kings 8, 13) This edifice had been erected according to Phoenician blueprints, oriented to the solar system. However, lest any one conclude from all this that Yahweh might be no more than the sun god, Solomon began his remarks--and here the Revised Standard Version has quite appropriately taken a reading from some Septuagint manuscripts into its text--Solomon started his remarks by saying, "The Lord (Yahweh) has set the sun in the heavens." In other words, Yahweh is not a part of the solar system; He is no less than its Creator. What is more, Solomon added, God "has said that he would dwell in thick darkness."

Here the Hebrew verb for "to dwell" means "to alight for the night." In the Septuagint it is rendered as skeenoun, which means "to tent." It is a specific reference to that presence of God among His people which was signified by the Tabernacle. To be sure, the days of the Tent of Meeting had come to an end; Solomon had been permitted to erect a more permanent house to the Lord. Despite this fact Solomon himself meant to insist that God's presence ranged beyond both the Temple as a building and the moment of its dedication as a place of worship.

Solomon pointed out that God had chosen to dwell in thick darkness. On the one hand, this was a reference to the presence of the ark in the windowless room known as the Holy of Holies. On the other, this is the language of dynamic symbolism, meant to describe the awesome mystery of God's gracious presence in the midst of His people. Here was an act of revelation; and yet God remained hidden. This serves as a reminder of the fact that the comprehension of man is unequal to the task of putting fully into words what God has done to break the silence of eternity.

An awareness of God's undiminished transcendence has a bearing on the art of Biblical interpretation. Whatever the Scriptures record of God's activity is so put as to forestall any thought that He can be contained in either place, time, logic, or language. The Biblical exegete, in other words, has the task of handling materials that deal with such divine realities as do indeed reach down into space and time and yet never become fully a part of it. God's ways are never completely captured in a formulation, whether it be a perfect deduction or a neatly structured syllogism. This is another way of saying that God always remains the subject of revelation even at the moment when He offers Himself to men in communion. In any relationship He creates in terms of revelation, God is never less than God.

God has revealed Himself in His redemptive activity as a person who moves along a line, as history does, and not in a circle in the manner of nature. This means that past, present, and future are an essential element in God's dealings with men. He is the God of promise, faithful in fulfilling His purposes at a point later than the original statement. He is the same yesterday, today and forever in the sense that He remains constant and dependable in keeping His word. His actions, bound as they are to a particular occurrence in the past, always contain a forward thrust. They point beyond themselves as events which have continuing relevance for God's people and so are to be remembered by each successive generation. (9)

Since these occurrences take place on the plane of history, God's acts are not repeated in precisely the same way. Yet there was repetition in the commemoration and interpretation put on these events by the worship of Israel, both in the desert and later in the Promised Land. Each year the great festivals served to remind Israel of what God had done for His people, and what He expected from them by way of response. Israel's liturgical life was cyclical in its motion; and yet these cycles moved forward along a line into an open future. They provided the occasion for reinterpreting life and history at the hand of those acts of God that constituted the creed of Israel. In this way Israel's worship was unique; for it had as the object of its adoration none other than the Lord of history and nature, that God who could never be contained within the structures of men, whose purposes were made more clear as the years rolled by. Precisely for this reason God's self-disclosure defies adequate definition. For, as Pascal once put it, God is not the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. He reveals Himself as the living God, moving through space and time to accomplish His purposes within the context of our history.

Now, it is no less than Himself that God disclosed to His children of old. On this point the instance of Samuel may be instructive. When he was still young, the word of the Lord was rare in Israel, the account tells us. (1 Sam. 3, 1) Samuel himself did not yet know the Lord, because, as the sacred writer puts it, "the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." (3, 7) Here the concepts word, revelation, and knowledge occur together and in a certain sequence. God had chosen to remain hidden for a time. No word came from Him. No action of His broke into the dreary routine of Israel's life. Each new day was like yesterday, despite the ritual at Shiloh. Samuel, too, remained without knowledge of God until the latter chose to manifest Himself to his servant.

And how did the Word of the Lord come to Samuel? When God called him by name in the darkness of the night, as one person addresses another. Revelation is essentially a dialog, in which God directs Himself to man in order to elicit an obedient response of the kind reflected in Samuel's answer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." (3, 10) Later on in the same chapter this word from the Lord is specifically referred to as God's revelation of Himself. We read, in verse 21, "The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by a word of the Lord." He called into the night not only to choose Samuel as His prophet but to unfold His intent with Israel. And so "the word of Samuel came to all Israel," we read.

Revelation, then, is at times described as a process of God speaking to individuals. He said to Abraham, for instance, "Go from your country and your kindred..." (Gen. 12, 1) We read of Him speaking to Moses again and again. Just what kind of experiences such expressions are intended to describe is impossible to ascertain. In fact, such a question was of no interest at all to the sacred authors. They used this particular language to show that there are two poles in any act of revelation, God and man, and that God Himself must speak in order to break through in communion with His creatures. God does not contain Himself within the silence of eternity, but projects Himself into our history in order to communicate with man. He comes forward, so to speak. He shows His hand to intervene savingly for mankind.

That such contact with God at His calling requires a dimension of language which ranges above the vocabulary used to describe ordinary observations and experiences is evident from the description Isaiah gives us of the vision by which he was called to become God's prophet. "In the year that king Uzziah died," he wrote, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up..." (6, 1) This sentence opens with the language of straight chronicle. The rest of the chapter, however, bursts through the two-dimensional vocabulary of normal human experience to depict God breaking into the life of an individual for the purpose of unfolding His saving purposes. Here we are in the area of revelation; its language comes in three dimensions.

This differentiation in vocabulary has to be kept in mind by the interpreter of the Bible, particularly in our age. We are all familiar with the linear process of reasoning and even with the dimension of breadth by which we add substance and content to our logical structures. But our secularized age is almost entirely unfamiliar with the concept of depth in language, the dimension of intuition, artistic creation, of poetry, and of revelation. Our culture is much too content to work without giving thought to life in its fullness. Our ordinary use of language is ascetic, depriving itself of the words that deal with the level of ultimate meaning. In revealing Himself, however, God proposes to communicate to us in our total existence.

The process of discrimination in language has been at work in our culture since the days of the Renaissance. Before the modern era, little thought was given to the fact that there are various kinds of language. Books on astrology and alchemy dating from the Middle ages, just by way of illustration, make an indiscriminate use of vocabulary. Theological, mythical, poetic and scientific words are used in the same paragraph, even in the same sentence, as though they all belonged to the same category. In interpreting the Scriptures we must keep in mind that these documents came into being long before language began to suffer from a process that might be described as one of dismantling. The Biblical writers did not work with linguistic and conceptual constructs such as our age lives with each day.

It is well nigh impossible, therefore, to interpret the Scriptural documents in such a way as to make them sound contemporary with us. In fact, any exegetical effort has to take the opposite direction. That is to say, it has the task of breaking out of our normal two-dimensional existence and handling concepts and ideas that derive from another level of life. Our everyday language is much too shallow to contain the Biblical revelation without major and even fatal adjustments. We might compare the terminology with which our secular culture works to a Mercator map. It is impossible to squeeze a polar map or a globe into its narrow limits. There is no room on it for the extra dimension. The Biblical interpreter will find that trying to reduce the language of revelation to the level of the stunted vocabulary of our culture resembles an attempt to get a cube to fit into a square space. In point of fact the status of the Bible in modern life amounts almost to this that it is a great answer to a question that men no longer know how to ask. (10)

Here we confront the basic fallacy inherent in any suggestion that we must demythologize our Scriptures. In point of fact, we must find room in our language and in our thought for the experience and content of divine revelation in its full claim. As we interpret the Scriptures, therefore, we must follow the apostle Peter in saying, as he did on Pentecost day, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet..." (Acts 2, 16) That is to say, the Biblical interpreter of our day has the task of unfolding the vast range of images, concepts and words of revelation in their full Biblical context and intent by inculcating an understanding of the total world-view of the sacred authors. Only then may he address himself to the question of contemporary relevance.

Our Scriptures speak of revelation as God's act of breaking into the closed circle of our existence for the purpose of making Himself known as the Lord of all life, all history and all nature. A rather common expression for God's approach to man is the phrase, "The word of the Lord came to...". Jeremiah, for example, begins his book by describing its contents as consisting of his own words, spoken and written in response to the word of the Lord that had come to him saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you..." (1, 5) It is of the utmost importance to note that what we have in this book is described in the opening verse as Jeremiah's own verbalizations of divine insights into personal and historic situations that came to him as separate acts or words from the Lord. In interpreting this document, therefore, we must be mindful of the prophet's own insistence that what we are reading are his words, put down by him, under divine impulse, to be sure, in order to describe his encounters with the Lord God on those occasions when God befell him, so to speak, with a word. It is from within this kind of experience that another great prophet, Isaiah, the son of Amoz, could declare that he saw the word of the Lord. (2, 1) It met his eyes, because the word of the Lord is in the last analysis God Himself confronting an individ-

That specific words may be part of God's revelation is certainly the significance of the account we have of God giving His Law on Mt. Sinai. (Ex. 20, 1-7) It should be noted, however, that even these "ten words" are preceded by God's disclosure of Himself as the God who had brought Israel out of the house of bondage. We have the "I am" before the "Thou shalt." That there was revelation through words as well as through acts is evident from such prophetic passages as Isaiah chapters 1 to 5 as contrasted with chapters 6 to 10. Purely predictive utterances, without reference to actual events, are given in the Biblical record; they occur, however, within the context of God's great act of having created Israel as His people. They have meaning only on the background of God's greatest dabhar in the Old Testament: the Exodus. Even though words may be involved in the act of revelation, or even constitute the revelation, it is not just the ears that are considered to be the channels of communication. On the contrary, God is depicted as addressing Himself to the whole man, even though the individual text under consideration may stress the hearing of the word of God.

In Biblical thought, then, revelation is the self-disclosure of God as a personal being to man as a person, that is to say, in action. Revelation, therefore, is not primarily a method of transmitting a body of information. Quite the contrary, God reveals His being as it relates to men by what He does and by the intent and manner of His activity. The impartation of supernatural knowledge, especially of the future, may indeed occur. But this is always secondary to the main theme. The incident of Saul looking for his father's donkeys (11) is illuminating in this connection. For when Saul came to Samuel to inquire about the donkeys, the answer concerned God's plans for His people. This concern for His Israel always remains the subject of revelation. No interpreter, therefore, will ever be able to manipulate the word of God, as he might master the content of a theorem in geometry. For the Lord Himself is always active in and through His word. He acts; His word is in essence not a noun but a verb. God is always its acting subject. He directs itself to us; we can only respond to His self-disclosure. We can never capture it; it always befalls us, touching the hollow of our thigh, as it were. (12)

All this is clear from the Old Testament statements which deal with this matter. To this the New Testament adds its own ringing testimony. To be sure, there is no single term, either in the Old Testament or in the New, that corresponds precisely to our English term "revelation," with its philosophical concerns. Yet the New Testament, like the Old, insists that the "traffic of Jacob's ladder" starts at the top.

At this point two words from the New Testament need to be considered in some detail. They are apokalypsis and phaneroosis, both of which are normally used to connote God's act of self-disclosure, both within history and at the end of time. The second of these two terms, we might add, is almost invariably used in contexts where time itself is an item of consequence.

Two passages, one from St. Peter the other from St. Paul, may be cited to indicate the prime significance of phaneroosis as God's action of unveiling within history what had been decided on in eternity. The first reference is to 1 Peter 1, 19-20 which reads, "But you were set free by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and blemish, chosen for this purpose before the world was founded, but manifested at the end of the ages..." Here we have a very direct statement describing the relationship between God's decision of grace before time began and the historic events by which His will and person were made known. This passage is a reminder, at the same time, of the fact that the Incarnation did not burst upon the vision of men unannounced. In fact, there is a very clear reference here to the slaying of the yearly passover lamb in Israel as an action pointing beyond itself to fulfillment at the end of the ages in a person who would suffer the same fate and for the same reason. An event in

time, then, became the vehicle for revealing God's will and grace in Him whom we know as the Logos, God's expression of Himself. We must note especially that it was Christ Himself whom God revealed. The revelation did not consist of some teaching or idea about Him, but the very person of the Messiah.

The method of revelation, including both promise and fulfillment, are the burden also of a passage from St. Paul. It is found in the third chapter of his letter to the Romans. There, beginning with the twenty-first verse, we have this striking remark, illustrating the proper use of the verb phaneroo: "In this present age, however, God's righteousness has been made manifest, as it was testified to by the law and the prophets..." Then there follows a description of what God did to make Himself plain as personally righteous and eager to declare men righteous on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus. Two steps in God's action are mentioned specifically: In eternity He decided that Christ Jesus should be the mercy-seat for men; and this decision was made manifest, it was realized, when Jesus shed His blood.

This event, in the language of St. Paul, was to accomplish a dual purpose. On the one hand, it was to help solve the puzzle of God's patience in dealing rather lightly with sins committed in days gone by; on the other, it was to show the extent to which God was willing to reach down among men in a desire for fellowship and communion. Just because God is righteous, Paul tells us, He set off the series of events by which He proposed to redeem men for service to Himself. The righteousness of God is just this determination of His to break out of His own isolation, so to speak, for the purpose of creating contact with His creatures on the basis of mercy and grace. It is in this way that the silence of eternity was and is filled with the sound of God's condescension.

A second word that occurs in the New Testament to give expression to the thought of revelation is apokalypsis. Quite frequently this term occurs in a context dealing with the parousia, the appearance of Jesus Christ in His heavenly splendor at the end of time. There are a few passages, however, where the verb occurs in the present tense with reference to what is taking place right now among men. Two of these are found very close together in the first chapter of Romans. In verse seventeen the term is used of God's righteousness; in the very next verse, it has reference to the disclosure of God's anger.

This double usage is very informative. It clarifies the relationship prevailing between certain occurrences and their significance as means of God's self-disclosure. God is seen in His anger when we observe how God abandons men to their own desires and designs because of their failure to follow whatever is known to them of God's existence and of His power. This statement from the apostle helps us to understand what he has in mind in saying that by the Gospel God makes known His righteousness. It is evident from the immediate context that Paul used the word "gospel" at this point not only with reference to content but in its sense of activity, the work of proclaiming the Good News. This implies that the church's preaching and teaching in succession to the apostle Paul are instruments of revelation. They are word of God. God is at work. The proclamation of the Good News is God's way of showing Himself to men as one who is anxious for communion on the basis of complete trust.

We may quarrel somewhat with the distinction Bultmann at times makes between kerygma and theology. For an understanding of revelation in its Biblical sense, however, this differentiation is useful in pointing out that the content of the Good News is God Himself as He confronts men in His royal prerogatives. In fact, the verb evangelizesthai in the Old Testament as time went on got to mean announcing the particular fact that God was kng. (13) At

this point our incarnate Lord picked up the term to proclaim, "The kingdom of God is at hand." (14) That is to say, Jesus was announcing that God Himself had entered our historic context to confront men in the person of His Son as their king and to gather together into a new Israel such as would respond in faith.

All of these considerations help us to appreciate why Professor Oepke of Leipzig, in his discussion of this particular subject in Kittel's Woerterbuch, says,

"Revelation is not the communication of supernatural knowledge, and not the stimulation of numinous feelings. Revelation can indeed give rise to knowledge and is necessarily accompanied by numinous feelings; yet it does not itself consist in these things but is quite essentially the action of Yahweh, an unveiling of His essential hiddenness, His offering of Himself in fellowship." (15)

A definition such as this obviously has its consequences for epistemology, even though the problem of knowledge is never posed as such in the Scriptures. Three elements in this contemporary definition are of special interest to us at this point. In the first instance, from the Biblical point of view, revelation is God's way of offering Himself in communion. (16) This means, in the second place, that in the revelatory process a person, a supernatural being, manifests Himself to us as individual persons by the nature and purpose of the activity He has undertaken on our behalf. That is to say, we learn to know God from what He has done and still does for us. Thirdly, this revelation of the divine purpose and person comes to man, the creature, by way of the cognitive faculty with which he is endowed for the purpose of responding with his whole person to God's disclosure of Himself.

In pointing to these characteristic features of Professor Oepke's statement, we become aware of the distance we have come since the days of the neat distinction made between reason and revelation by Thomas Aquinas and those who followed him in describing revelation as having to do with a supernatural method of communicating information that was not otherwise accessible to man. In fact, Aquinas himself subdivided the knowledge available to man by divine revelation into three categories; namely, information concerning God's nature, information concerning His supra-rational works (the Incarnation and its consequences), and information concerning suprarational events to be expected at the end of earthly history. (17)

This view of revelation lingers on wherever no account is taken of the fact that man is himself a part of any cognitive relationship. A clean differentiation between reason and revelation along scholastic lines is made possible only where knowledge is thought of as being the slow absorption or digestion of a quantity of facts and truths. Where man and the body of information he is to acquire are viewed as being entirely separate and neutral entities that are brought together by following the laws of the mind, there revelation is understood to be the verbal or conceptual communication of a body of truths by divine authority. In this view the Bible gets to be primarily a source-book of information, a collection of divine truths, rather than a record of and witness of God's redemptive acts.

Thomas Aquinas made no essential distinction between such truths as are available to reason and such as man can acquire only by revelation. The former served as the basement floor leading to the first story of revealed truths. The Reformation, to be sure, professed to reject the continuity between reason and revelation. It denied that there was anyway of proceeding from the level of reason to that of revelation. Knowledge, the scibile, was the proper

province of reason; faith, the credibile, was the correlative of reason. Reason might be used to help explain and define divine truths. Other than this, however, it remained unconnected with revelation.

There were moments when Luther himself broke through the system and structure of thought born of this distinction between reason and revelation. He saw beyond the words and formulations not only of the church but also of the Scriptures themselves to God as He had revealed Himself in Christ at the level of personal communion rather than by way of divinely imparted truths. (18) However, these precious insights were quickly obscured in the age of Protestant orthodoxy, which chose to fight Roman Catholic theology with weapons forged out of scholastic categories and methods.

The disintegration of the scholastic and Protestant orthodox conception of revelation began with a growing awareness, hastened by the age of the Enlightenment, that the knowing or believing subject is not without influence on the content of revelation, that, in fact, the individual human being is himself a part of any cognitive relationship. (19) The discoveries of our century that both time and space are relative, and that reality is essentially dynamic have not left the whole question of knowledge untouched. The time-honored procedure of making a more or less absolute distinction between the deliverances of the unaided intellect and the acceptance of divinely communicated information has lost most of its meaning in current theological thought. Today knowledge is viewed indeed as an activity of the mind, yet not so much in terms of creativity as of response. Knowledge, then, is thought of as being determined by its object rather than by its subject. The individual's cognition is valid only in so far as it is determined by the reality with which he is confronted. The laws of the mind, therefore, are laws for thought rather than of thought; they are laws of the reality which the human intellect attempts to know, or is invited to accept. (20)

The effect of all this on the concept of revelation must certainly be obvious, especially in the light of the fact that the content of the knowledge offered by the Scriptures is God Himself in His redemptive purpose and activity. Such revelation can only be from subject to subject, from mind to mind; it consists of God unveiling His own thoughts of grace and judgment to the human mind. This takes place only in relationship of one person to other persons.

Such a relationship defies precise analysis. It is a deeply mysterious process. Yet in the unfolding of this mystery we are assured that nothing less than God's own will and intent are being disclosed. Accordingly, in the Biblical perspective, what is revealed to us is not chiefly a body of information concerning various things of which we might otherwise be ignorant. If it is information at all, it has to do with whatever attends a glimpse into the very heart of God in His redemptive concern for us.

In a very real sense, therefore, it is impossible to speak of revelation as an objective reality, independent of personal reaction on the part of him to whom a disclosure is made. This helps to explain the Biblical usage of the term "knowledge." Knowing means standing in a personal relationship to God's manifestation of Himself. "This is life eternal," Jesus said on the night of His betrayal, "that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John 17, 3) Such knowledge is not a matter of acquiring information but of being confronted with God Himself as He is revealed in His Son.

This kind of knowing stands in striking contrast to what we may refer to as natural knowledge. In the instance of the latter, a person sets out to master a body of information. In time he can begin to control and to manipulate these materials. The content of such

knowledge is subservient to the knowing subject. This can never happen in the sphere of divine revelation. To be sure, in theology we may attempt to put into words what God discloses of Himself. We may undertake, for example, to describe God in a long list of attributes. These we can learn and master. Yet they are only our own feeble handiwork, necessary, to be sure, but very limited in their function. Revelation has to do with getting to know God Himself. And He is always greater than any formulation concerning Him. (21)

For this reason the Biblical concept of truth rests on the person-to-person relationship established in revelation. In the Old Testament the terms emeth and emunah, almost without exception, mean reliability, faithfulness, dependability and loyalty. In the New Testament, the word aletheia retains much of this Old Testament flavor that at times--especially in John-- acquires the additional idea of reality as opposed to falsehood and illusion. In no instance does it signify factual precision, as truth is usually understood today.

Jesus can, therefore, be described as saying of Himself, "I am the Truth." (John 14, 6) He did not say, "I have the truth." Least of all did He ever remark, "I have the facts at my disposal." For what He meant to indicate was that He came as the final manifestation of God's complete faithfulness. This helps to explain His other saying, "Every one who is of the truth, hears my voice." (John 18, 37) Such a remark assumes a proper personal relationship to God and His Son rather than a capacity for absorbing right information.

An appreciation of the Scriptural view of truth is of considerable import for the interpreter. The Biblical documents reflect an understanding of truth as being bound to a personal relationship. What the sacred writers record and what they give their witness to is God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. They do so, moreover, from within their own personal limitations in terms of historical, geographical, or scientific information. Luther could, therefore, remark that the author of Kings was more accurate than the writer of Chronicles in his historical statements. (22) This observation, however, did not lead him to reject Chronicles as unworthy of being included among the canonical books. When he voiced a criticism of a particular document--as in the case of Esther or James--he did so only on the grounds that neither book spoke of Christ.

It would be folly to accept the zoological or biological information contained in Leviticus, let us say, as scientifically accurate in a present-day sense. Again it is no perversion of Biblical truth to realize that Jude's attribution of a quotation from the Book of Enoch to Enoch himself, "the seventh from Adam," is not intended to bind us in terms of fact. As far as Jude's information went this was a correct statement to make. Today we are sure that the Book of Enoch dates from somewhere between 200 to 50 B.C., and that Jude's reference is to this book. Or take another case. At one point the evangelist Matthew ascribes a quotation from Zechariah to Jeremiah. In his Exposition of the Prophet Zechariah, Luther observes at this point that the evangelist made a mistake in his facts but that he got the heart of the matter despite this inaccuracy. (23) In saying this Luther was mindful of the intent of Scripture, which is to make us "wise unto salvation." That is its only function. It was not created to provide information on all kinds of assorted subjects, independent of God's plan of salvation.

A concern for truth in the sense of factual accuracy is a phenomenon peculiar to modern Western culture, especially since the Age of the Enlightenment. It is unknown to this day in many other parts of the world. The introductory comments on the book of Daniel in the Interpreter's Bible make a point of this as they consider some of the minor historical inaccuracies of this apocalyptic document. The commentator illustrates his point by an analogy from a

situation that might develop in modern Islam. An Arab sheik, holding forth to his tribal group with a message most pertinent to contemporary problems, might present the issue as follows:

'When the first Elizabeth had been reigning ten years over the English and her rival Philip, who in reality was her husband, was ruling over Spain, the ships of the English set forth from the north of England and rediscovered America, which, as we know, had earlier been discovered by the Arabs, who had made nought of it. They were followed there closely by the ships of Spain. There was much rivalry between them and strife over its riches and wonders till they said, 'Let us be wise. America is two. Let the English take the north and the people of Spain the south.' It was so, and the people of Spain were content, but the ships of the English, ever restless came also to the lands of Islam. Then, too, following them, came their progeny who had waxed mighty in America." (24)

Now, there are all kinds of factual discrepancies in this statement; and yet it embodies the truth intended to be communicated by the sheik from within his culture. He did not propose to inculcate exact historical information at this point. He was interested in propounding an interpretation of a certain problem in international relations as this affected the lives and fortunes of his tribe.

Similarly, the book of Daniel proposes to teach God's faithfulness to His promises. To stress that Jerusalem was captured, not in the third year of Jehoiakim (606 B. C.) but of Jehoiachin (597 B. C.); that Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus and not of Nebuchadrezzar, and that he was never a king; that "satrap" was not a Babylonian but a Persian title--to get lost in a discussion of such matters is to miss the whole point of the books.

In the Scriptural sense truth is practically synonymous with revelation. Neither term has to do primarily with the inculcation or acquisition of information; neither concept suggests chiefly the transmission and acceptance of information as such. Both are used to God's own self-disclosure. Hence the books of the Old Testament that we call historical are described as "the earlier prophets" in the Jewish canon, for the history they record is not that of the people of Israel but of God's dealings with His people. This alone is a reminder of the distance we have come from the idea of revelation which scholasticism devised and imposed with various modifications on the church for many centuries as consisting of the supernatural and infallible communication of propositional truths.

In this connection it might be well to devote a moment to the discussion of the term "inerrancy." This has become something of a shibboleth to provide a device for determining a person's general attitude toward the Scriptures. It is a term that bulked very large in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of a few decades ago. In fact, the inerrancy of Scripture constituted the last and fifth point to be dealt with in the twelve-volume series known as the Fundamentals, which originally appeared around 1910. The term is still used as a kind of hallmark of fundamentalistic Biblical scholarship.

The time has come to insist that the word "inerrancy" is inappropriately used of the Scriptures. In the first place, it obscures the nature of Biblical revelation; for it is a term used on the level of observation and factual precision. But this notion of truth is not found in the Scriptures. Moreover, using the term "inerrancy" suggests that the primary concern of the Bible is to furnish information of some sort or another. If the Scriptures were a collection of truths rather than a recorded testimony to the Truth of God Himself, there might be some

justification for the use of this term. As the case for revelation now stands, any use of the term is at best misleading.

The proper Biblical concept for this aspect of the Scriptures is reliability. God reveals Himself as utterly dependable in keeping His promises and carrying out His will. The Scriptural documents serve as witnesses to this revelation. They must, therefore, be understood as reliable within the framework of the single function of the Bible, which is to "make us wise unto salvation." There can be little doubt of the fact that the sacred documents under discussion, as well as the decisions on their canonicity, imply and assume the complete faithfulness of their respective authors as witnesses to the saving events recorded there.

There are specific contexts in church life, such as vows of ordination, in which the adjective "infallible" occurs as an attribute of the Scriptures. A Lutheran pastor, for example, is expected to use the Scriptures as the only "infallible rule of faith and practice." In fact, this is part of his vow when he enters the ministry. The very limitation indicated by the combination "faith and practice" suggests that the Scriptures do not deceive the reader and user, that they are a dependable guide in faith and life. This is quite something different from insisting that every piece of information given in the Bible is factually accurate in our contemporary sense.

The Biblical revelation itself insists that it is bound to specific moments in history. This historical particularity is of the very essence of God's ways in disclosing Himself. The very limitations of the individual authors in terms of language, geographical, historical, and literary knowledge testify to the specifics of divine revelation. This is part of the "scandal" of the Bible. An insistence on its "inerrancy" is often an attempt to remove this obstacle. The use of the term almost invariably results in a docetic view of the Bible and so tends to overlook the fact that our Sacred Scriptures are both divine and human documents.

II. The Means of Revelation

We have now established that in the Biblical view revelation is an "opening of the door from within, without waiting for the knock from outside." (25) Without this presupposition the Scriptures remain a closed book. For it is the Living God to whom the Bible introduces us. Now we must proceed to a discussion of the means God has employed to reveal Himself to men. These deserve a fuller treatment than the occasional references made to them in our previous description of the concept of revelation.

As already indicated in our first section, one of the terms most frequently used in the language of revelation is "the word of God." This concept occurs in the Old Testament as dabhar in some combination or other no less than four hundred times. Now, dabhar does not mean word only; it is frequently used of God's acts. In fact, the whole distinction between logos and ergon, between word and work, is a Greek idea, which is not reflected in Biblical usage. Even in John's Gospel doing and saying occur as practically synonymous, as, for example, in 8, 28, "...I do nothing on my own but speak thus as the Father taught me." The expression "word of God" is used with particular reference to those acts of God by which He manifested His redemptive power. These revelatory events are charged with all the characteristics of God Himself and convey God to men as the recipients and beneficiaries of such communication.

These mighty acts of God are occasionally referred to as tehiloth in the Hebrew and as aretai in Greek. They are of such a nature as to reveal the "mighty arm of God" at work to

liberate and to redeem. A typical series of such divine interventions is described in Psalm 78. Very significantly the very mention of the deeds of the Lord is called teaching, pointing up the pedagogical significance of the fact that the doctrine of Scripture is derived from a response to and reflection upon God's acts. Biblical theology is basically recital theology. (26)

In the Old Testament the greatest of all of God's "Words" was the Exodus. This was the divinely creative dabhar by which Israel became God's community. From then on God's "Words" came to men within the life and experience of this people, and the record of them developed in Israel as God's "kingdom of priests." The Exile and particularly the return from Babylon were further acts of revelation. Behind both of these, in terms of chronology, stood the creation of the universe. In the New Testament it is the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and particularly the Resurrection (including the Ascension and the Session) that rank as the mightiest of God's acts. These, too, were recorded and witnessed to by persons of the new community, the church. In a very real sense, therefore, we must think of our Scriptures as the book of the people of God, created within the worshiping community of both testaments. (27)

Of and by themselves the great occurrences recorded in Scripture meant nothing much. To be sure, the Egyptians are described as having been able to conclude from Israel's escape that Yahweh was the Lord. (28) But in this case such an insight remained without redemptive significance. Hence God raised up individuals who were given special illumination, sometimes called inspiration in contemporary theology, so that they might see the theological significance of, let us say, the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, or of Israel's return from captivity. By being so interpreted these historic occasions became events. That is to say, they were creative occurrences producing desired effects.

Now, a very unique feature of the Biblical revelation is this that the "Words of God," His mighty acts, must always be understood in their particular setting within history. Revelation does not consist in unveiling timeless truths. God did not hurl His absolutes out into the universe at random. On the contrary, the manifestations He gave of Himself and of His will are bound to specific historical contexts. They are pegged down in terms of time and locale. In this way they have been woven into the very fabric of history. This is one reason they come down to us as relevant events: They are part of the background that we have inherited and that helps to make our life meaningful. What is even more noteworthy is that they are acts of God experienced within a community that enjoys an abiding historical continuity in consequence of God's redemptive activity. (29)

To illustrate the significance of historical particularity for revelation, we might take the case of John the Baptist. His activities, his words and even his dress served as instruments of revelation. The last chapters of Isaiah had sounded out the good news that God would reign. Malachi had ended his prophecies with a reference to the return of Elijah before the coming of the great day of the Lord. These two ideas joined forces in the development of Israel's thoughtlife to create the image of the Messenger (mebaseer) who would precede the Messiah. To fulfill this expectation, John the Baptist came into the desert of Judea, dressed like Elijah, and appropriating to himself and his task those words from Isaiah 40 which spoke of Israel's return from captivity. Here we have factual rather than verbal revelation. Whatever words John spoke were uttered to interpret his own coming in terms of the returning remnant. His very appearance in the desert of Judea was a way of saying that the time for creating a new people of God had come.

Here, incidentally, we confront the phenomenon of recapitulation, a subject to which Irenaeus was the first in the history of the church to devote a great deal of formal discussion. Strictly speaking, history does not repeat itself. In this respect it is unlike nature with its recurrence of seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. Hence it is not possible to define an historic event. It belongs to no class of things. It is sui generis. In history, therefore, we have to be content with description. Despite this fact, however, God used several variations of certain recurring themes in the work of revealing Himself to men. The recurrence of previous patterns in divine intervention was a hallmark of genuineness in later redemptive events.

The whole cluster of events surrounding Israel's exodus became a type of future divine interventions. Israel was liberated at the Red Sea, baptized in its waters, as St. Paul puts it. In its wake there were to follow other acts of redemption. When the time for gathering a new people of God had come, John appeared in the desert, baptizing with water. His coming was interpreted to be a new exodus as seen in the light of Israel's later return from Babylon.

Israel had eaten manna in the desert. In remembering this past miracle at their festivals, God's people looked forward to a time when the Lord would again do such a sign. Jesus, therefore, fed the five thousand and the four thousand in the desert, in this way revealing Himself as the Messiah and indicating that the Messianic age had come in fulfillment of expectations born of previous experiences with the God of promise. In the sixth chapter of his Gospel, the evangelist John goes to great lengths in spelling out the nature of this recapitulation, interpreting the miracle of the loaves in terms of fulfillment rather than of mere repetition. (30)

This introduces us to a uniquely Biblical concept, the idea of fulfillment. It has to do with history, but not as a continuous linear movement. When the New Testament speaks of the fullness of time it points to a center in history, to a period when certain events took place that had meaning for all time. They had not occurred before and will not happen again. But at the same time they give meaning not only to the story of God's dealings with His own people but to the whole story of mankind. Their quality is such as to give us a clue to the meaning of history as a whole. They were decisive in their significance for all that had gone before and for all that was to follow.

For the interpreter of the Bible it is important to realize that fulfillment means more than the verbal correspondence between the description of a New Testament event and some prophetic utterance in the Old. It is much bigger than the idea of some word of prophecy coming to rest at a prescribed point and in a predicted person, although this is included. From a Biblical point of view all of the history that went into the creation and preservation of Israel as God's people centers in Jesus Christ. This is why Matthew can without further ado apply the words of Hosea, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," to the return of Jesus from Egypt. (31) The temptations that befell Israel in the desert overtook Jesus under similar surroundings. For He came as the true Israel, God's first-born, His chosen one. Moreover, He came as a new Moses and was hailed on Palm Sunday as another David. Israel had had to suffer as Yahweh's servant; in the fullness of time Jesus revealed Himself to be the suffering Servant and subsumed this destiny under His self-designation as the Son of Man.

We must add to this the observation that the person and work of Jesus embodied the experience and destiny of the New Israel, the church. He could speak of His risen body as a

temple. In a very real sense the church is both this body and this temple. Both the past and the future of God's people are described as coming to rest in Jesus Christ. This is the full significance of John 5, 39: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." On this basis we must insist that Jesus stands at the very center of time, as the fulfillment of all of God's ancient promises.

The revelation of God, therefore, occurs within history and, in fact, through history as seen from within the people of God. To this story of God's redemptive activity we sometimes apply the term Heilsgeschichte, which has been translated variously as holy history, or the history of redemption, or even saving history. Now, the Scriptures are quite explicit in their insistence that the events recorded there are not to be thought of as occurring next to history or possibly above it. On the contrary, the fabric of these occurrences, involving man's redemption, is made to a high degree of the same stuff as the rest of the history of the ancient Near East and Graeco-Roman culture. In fact, the archaeological discoveries of the last century have demonstrated the large extent to which Israel belonged to the social and cultural milieu of the total Fertile Crescent. Moreover, Luke's insistence on the precise historical context of John the Baptist's ministry, the description of Jesus' trial as having taken place under Pontius Pilate, as well as the rather detailed account we have of Paul's activities all testify to a close connection between these events and what was taking place in the world around them. None of these things happened in a corner, so to speak, but at the very cross-roads of the ancient world. (32)

Yet their significance in terms of God's purposes was not understood except from within God's community. God revealed Himself only in the covenant relationship. The meaning of such events as the Babylonian exile or the activity of the early church were usually misread by such as had not come into the circle of God's truth. There was really nothing para-historical or supra-historical in the structure of these occurrences. Yet they were seen as mighty acts of God only in the light of the interpretation put on them by prophet, apostle, poet, wise man, teacher and evangelist. At the same time, God made it known to His people that the events of their own history might be used to interpret God's intent for all of history. The specific occurrences employed by God to reveal Himself and His will serve as tracer bullets, one might say, by which it is possible from within the Christian community to determine the general direction for all that is happening among men. This does not mean that any given occurrence (Dunkirk for example) can receive a definitive interpretation in the light of the events recorded and witnessed to by the Scriptures; for there is no authoritative prophetic or apostolic word on this point. Only the general quality and outcome of the historic process can be interpreted meaningfully.

At this point, we must come to grips with the problem of the resurrection. It has been argued that this cannot be considered as an historical occurrence for the reason that it cannot be validated by any principles of historiography. Because of its extraordinary nature, others have called it a supra-historical event, in the sense that it took place at a point where man's time and God's time intersect. Be that as it may, when viewed from within the Christian community, there can be no question as to the historical nature of the resurrection. To this end the apostle Paul introduces the names and numbers of a series of witnesses who had themselves seen the risen Lord, some of whom were still alive and available for their testimony when he wrote the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Moreover, the evangelists refer to the empty tomb in such a way as to suggest an apologetic concern. (33) To be sure, an empty grave might be explained in other ways. In fact, it has received other interpretations, but none of them fully explain how it was possible for this particular tomb to be empty under the circumstances described except as the result of a rising from the dead.

The accounts that we have of this event leave us in no doubt whatsoever that they were written to testify not to a noble figment of excited imaginations but to an actual occurrence. The burden of this testimony is not that there is no death but that it has been overcome by one who entered the context of our history and subsequently rose above it.

Does the fact that this testimony comes from within the community of God's people impugn the historical character of the resurrection as an event? No more than the quasi-religious language of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address invalidates an historian's factual account of the birth of our nation. The historiographer may feel quite certain that his outside or "objective" approach is the only valid one. In terms of his particular methodology, he may be quite right. However, any insistence that there is no other interpretation of an occurrence than his own may deprive the historian of the privilege and thrill of confronting an event rather than analyzing a happening. (34) The signing of the Declaration of Independence must be described and understood not only as an incident. It was an event because of the effect it had on the people of a new nation. Similarly, we may grant that we have no "objective" source of information on the resurrection. If we had, it could yield no more than the observation that it had occurred. Only from within the newly created relationship between God and men, which Jesus came to establish, could the resurrection take on the proportions of a divine saving event.

Before we leave the question of the connection between Heilgeschichte and history as such we must consider one other serious problem; namely, the nature of the materials given in Genesis chapters 1-11. There can be no question as to the difference between what is recorded in these early chapters and what follows with the introduction of the story of Abraham. Even the language is often different, at times being highly symbolical, as in the story of man's fall. (35)

For one thing, it is reasonably evident that we have here the language of theological interpretation. Whatever sources of information may have been available to the writer, it is fairly clear that at least the structure, if not the content, of these chapters, was determined by Israel's concern for the origin of things in the light of her own choice as God's people. We hasten to add that this does not deprive these chapters of their revelatory function. In fact, the very first two chapters of Genesis unveil God as the creator of the universe, as a person outside and above both time and space. Such a God was not known to the religions of other peoples contemporary with Israel. The account of creation is followed by an explanation of how man came under the influence of sin with its frightening consequences.

We have here the language of origins, but without the confused cosmogonies and theogonies of other religions. These early accounts were put together within the community of Israel to throw some light on the questions, Whence came the universe; and, particularly, Whence came man's corruption? We might ask, is this history? In the sense that there was an Adam and Eve, that there was an act of disobedience against God, one would need to apply affirmatively in the light of the total Biblical record. But if it is a question of applying methods of historical investigation and validation, the answer would have to be, No! This of course, does not affect the truth of the various accounts contained in these early chapters. They still report what God did as creator and lord of both nature and history, and how man responded to His Creator's claims on him.

With this observation we reach the point where we must raise the issue of the Bible's own relationship to God's means of revelation. This is in essence the question raised at the very outset; namely, In what sense is the Bible the Word of God? Strictly speaking and in a primary sense the Scriptures are not themselves a revelation. They are unlike the Book of Mormon, which is said to have come into being as a result of a single miraculous discovery in a hillside at

sense the Scriptures are not in themselves a revelation. They are unlike the Book of Mormon, which is said to have come into being as a result of a single miraculous discovery in a hillside at Palmyra, N. Y. Our Bible is the record of God's revelatory acts. At the same time it is a witness of God's redeeming will and actions. No sacred writer ever remained uninvolved and uncommitted. No Biblical author wrote objectively or from a neutral point of view. St. Mark, for instance, did not set out to compose a life of Christ in the sense of a biography. In his book he proposed to present Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of Man, with all that this title implied. St. John did not remain a mere spectator to our Lord's suffering. He wrote of it in terms of redemptive significance and as one determined to show that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

The Biblical documents confront us, therefore, with personal testimony, with an interpretation of events. This is not without its bearing on the art of Biblical interpretation. The wording and formulations of the Scriptures almost always intend to point beyond themselves to the great events of what we have called Heilsgeschichte. (36) They cannot be handled adequately by a methodology bound to a two-dimensional approach of occurrence as mere fact. For the sacred authors worked with the language of depth, of meaning, embodying their faith in God and His Anointed. At the same time the interpreter will do well to be concerned with attempting to arrive, to the degree that this is possible, at the substratum of historical occurrence in each event recorded, if for no other reason than to observe just what kind of happenings God used and had interpreted prophetically in order to manifest Himself.

As the record of God's great acts of redemption, the Scriptures contain various forms of literature, in many respects not at all dissimilar in their terminology and structure to documents from other ancient religions. The Biblical interpreter must reckon with these similarities and, of course, also with the diversities in both form and content. For example, there are obvious similarities between the creation and flood accounts as given in Genesis and in the Babylonian myths dealing with these same themes. The Biblical interpreter will ignore the similarities only at his own peril. He will be left without a full appreciation of such places where the Old Testament baptizes the language of ancient mythology into its own use, as, for instance in Psalm 74, 13, 14: "Thou didst divide the sea by thy might; thou didst break the heads of the dragons on the waters. Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan..." There is nothing about dragons and Leviathan in the Genesis account. The Psalmist simply employed the language and imagery of contemporary mythology to praise God for His creative act. Here the concepts of the Psalm are those of the total cultural outlook of the ancient Near East. On the other hand, we must also insist that there is no literature outside the church quite like the four Gospels. They are sui generis, with a structure born either out of conscious imitation of the book of Exodus or out of the pattern of worship established in the early church, especially the Passover liturgy.

A single theme runs through the whole of Scriptures. What we have in these various documents is a series or cluster of witnesses to God's "good pleasure" in liberating His people. Even the ministry of our Lord is described in these terms by the evangelist John. The works that Jesus did--and not only His words--testified to the gracious will of the Father. His life was a means of revelation, and His Words were a running commentary, so to speak, on God's saving purpose. Both pointed beyond themselves to the Father. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," Jesus is quoted as saying to Philip. (John 14, 9) Now, if even this life was one of witness, how much more is the record of it a witness to revelation rather than a revelation in itself?

The fourth Gospel is quite explicit in this matter. "These things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20, 31) What is said here in so many

words applies to the Scriptures as a whole. They were written as a witness to the redemptive activity of God. Their purpose is to point to those events from which we know God as gracious and redeeming. The Scriptures are, in fact, the story of all that God did to set us free from every thing that spoils life. (37)

Moreover, they are our only source of information on the subject matter of our redemption. They are God's Word in the sense that they convey to us the only authoritative interpretation of God's acts. We speak of them, therefore, as inspired documents. Now, what do we mean by such a statement? And what is the connection, if any, between inspiration and revelation?

We must note, first of all, that the English word "inspiration," as applied specifically to the Old Testament, occurs only once; namely, in II Timothy 3, 16, where we read: "All Scripture is given in inspiration of God." In point of fact, however, the Greek word translated as "given by inspiration" signifies "God-breathed." And this must be distinguished very carefully from what generally passed for inspiration in those days. The passage in Timothy speaks of God-breathed documents or passages. The expression is similar to a thought associated with the creation of man in the second chapter of Genesis. We read there that God breathed into man the breath of life; and man became a living being. This certainly means that man was hereby endowed with life and creativity. In much the same sense, the Scriptures are living documents, testifying to the work of a life-giving God. Every such document came into being to create faith. (38) Each one is in some way a record of and witness to that divine revelation which confronts man with the claims of a living God.

At the same time these documents are God-breathed in the sense that God Himself took a hand in their creation. Revelation may be described as that divine action which caused the mighty acts of God to take place; inspiration may be thought of as God's action that caused the Bible to be written. We have been accustomed to limit the term inspiration to some special guidance provided by the Holy Spirit to the writers of the individual Biblical books. Whether the Timothy passage intends to suggest this limited view is very doubtful, particularly when we recall the fact that the Septuagint, a translation of the original Hebrew text, in most instances served as the Scriptures of the apostles and of the early church. It would probably be more correct to say that the theopneustos of II Timothy 3, 16 refers to God's creative activity and guidance in all the factors and ingredients that went into the making of the Biblical documents. These would include oral tradition, liturgical practice, documentary sources, and, of course, the research and investigation undertaken in the course of preparing a Biblical book, as well as the work of translation.

There can be little real doubt that the New Testament authors thought of the Old Testament as inspired. This is evident for instance, from an incidental reference to the Holy Spirit such as we find in Matthew 22, 43: "How, then, does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying..." There follows a quotation from Psalm 110. However, the only New Testament book that claims inspiration for itself in so many words is the Apocalypse, at 1, 10, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me... a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book..." and also at 1, 3; 22, 18 and 19, where the contents of this book are spoken of as "words of prophecy." In addition, St. Paul, at least tentatively, once briefly referred to himself as having written an opinion under the influence of the Spirit (1 Cor. 7, 40). The evangelists, however, never claim inspiration for themselves. (39) They possibly assume this, as the church certainly did when it began to wrestle with the question of canonicity.

One other reference needs some attention in this connection, because it is often cited in support of a view of inspiration narrowly limited to the actual composition of a book of

Scripture. This is 1 Peter 1, 21, which says, "No prophecy ever came into being by a man's own determination; rather, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." A careful analysis of this passage, however, will show that this being "carried along by the Holy Spirit" is not intended to refer to the writing of the prophecies, but rather to their utterance. The writer uses the same verb here that is found a few verses earlier in a description of the voice of the Father breaking into the Transfiguration event. The point of the passage is that, where prophets spoke, their words were those of God intervening in the affairs of men. To be sure, the previous verse speaks of such prophecies as written down in Scripture. They are the record of what prophets have said. In their written form they cannot be interpreted properly without the help of that Holy Spirit who caused them to be uttered in the first place. The twenty-first verse, therefore, does not actually speak of inspiration in the sense of some special guidance which was given to the individual Biblical writers as they composed their documents but only to the speaking of prophecies.

Yet it would seem that this passage from Second Peter is useful for our understanding of inspiration as it relates to revelation. In the first place, it is a reminder that these are not the same. God reveals Himself primarily in His actions. These, however, would neither be fully understood nor even known were it not for a prophetic explanation and a written account of both occurrence and interpretation. (40) To provide such a written source of information God used men who came under the special influence of His Spirit for the purpose of providing an oral interpretation of and witness to an event and then to compose a written record of the occurrence and God's intended purpose. We might apply the adjective "con-cursive" to the activity of the Spirit in the process of inspiration. This term would suggest that the Spirit acted in and through the writers in such a way as to make their thinking and writing both free and spontaneous and also elicited and controlled. What these men wrote was not only their own work but also that of the Spirit. In this sense, then, the Scriptures are the inspired account of God's revelatory activity. This means that the Scriptures themselves are not a revelation, but a medium of revelation, whereby we today are brought into contact with God's redeeming acts in their claim on us.

For an appreciation of the relationship between revelation and inspiration Acts 10, 34 is useful. There the apostle Peter is reported as saying, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." Luke has recorded this as part of his inspired account. The formulation is given as Peter's, as his verbalization of the significance of the vision he had had in Joppa and his meeting with Cornelius. The vision was the revelatum. Some words accompanied the vision, but not the ones recorded here. God's act of having Peter see a vision is interpreted and formulated by the apostle. Both are recorded by Luke. From this we can get some idea as to how the Bible is God's Word.

But preaching in God's Word, too! In fact, in the normal course of things, as Karl Barth has pointed out many times, men are brought into contact with God's revelation of Himself by the oral proclamation or presentation of God's Good News. That is to say, the news of God's mighty liberating acts comes to men from within the Christian community by the church's preaching and teaching.

No so long ago theologians attempted to draw a sharp line of distinction between kerygma and didache. That fad has passed, mostly because the difference between the work of proclamation and the task of teaching is not fully sustained by the New Testament. In both, as well as in the administration of the Sacraments, God is at work confronting men with Himself. In a way, therefore, we can also think of these activities as Word of God. Of course, whatever doctrine

there is, must be of the kind that points beyond itself as a witness to the mighty acts of God. Formulation is not revelation; and revelation is more than information. Revelation is event in the sense that it is God at work offering Himself in communion through those actions that are recorded by and witnessed to by prophets, apostles, poets, wise men and evangelists.

The teaching of these sacred writers is the only authoritative source for any kind of proclamation and formulation of doctrine. The office of apostle, in particular, is thought of by the New Testament as a unique, unrepeatable extension of the Lord's own ministry of witness to His Father's grace and love. It took the church some decades to apply this insight. But in her conflict with heresies and divisions she was forced to recognize a difference between apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition. The former, the church began to insist, exercised and imposed an authority which the latter lacked. In time therefore, the church spoke of herself as apostolic. By this she understood that she was bound by the teaching of the apostolic tradition. (41)

The function of doctrine in the church today is that of formulating the Good News of God's rule in such a way as to speak relevantly to our age. For this reason doctrinal statements must come under constant scrutiny lest they obscure rather than clarify God's revelation of Himself. The church's doctrine must point beyond itself by way of the Scriptures to the redemptive activity behind the record. When so formulated, doctrine, too, may be spoken of as Word of God; for in such teaching God Himself is at work confronting the individual with His grace.

The authoritative documents for the church's teaching are those found in our Scriptures. Their testimony is a single one. Hence the word "doctrine" occurs only in the singular, except there where reference is made to teachings other than that of God. This is striking confirmation of the fact that in revelation God discloses Himself and not just all kinds of assorted information about divine things. There are no doctrines of God; there is only doctrine.

The Scriptures are the written source for this doctrine. For this reason there is no task more urgent and significant for Christian life than that of Biblical interpretation. This must be undertaken with all the intellectual skill and spiritual acumen with which the individual interpreter of Scripture is endowed.

In this connection a word is in order on the subject of general revelation as distinct from the special self-disclosure of God recorded in the Scriptures. Is there a way of knowing God apart from the acts of revelation described and interpreted for us in the Biblical account? This is a question we must consider next.

We must hasten to observe that this is not the same issue as the question regarding natural theology; for the latter concept disintegrated with the growing awareness that revelation has to do with disclosure rather than discovery. The problem of natural theology can arise only where revelation is still thought of as a process of transmitting a body of information, and where the scholastic distinction between morality and religion is retained.

The matter of general revelation is raised in the light of such passages as Psalm 19, 1-5 and Romans 1, 19, 20. These texts are often adduced to support the contention, particularly strong in Archbishop Temple's works, that God discloses Himself also in nature and history generally viewed. It is very doubtful, however, whether this is the intent of the Scripture passages cited. It is quite unlikely that Psalm 19 was intended to suggest a revelation apart from the Torah described in the latter portion of the Psalm. As E. F. Scott has put it: "The

Psalmist never doubted the existence of God, and requires no proof of it... His mood is one of sheer reapture, and this is always the mood of those Hebrew poets. They do not argue from nature, but exult in it..." (42)

The passage from the first chapter of Romans, moreover, would seem to suggest less that God disclosed Himself in the works of creation and more that man is so constructed as to make inferences from nature as to the existence and power of God. That is to say, man can, by reflection, by his intellect, obtain certain information about "the invisible things of God." This, however, is more a matter of discovery on man's part and less a disclosure of God Himself. Much the same would apply to St. Paul's remarks made at Lycaonia (Acts 14, 17). There he suggested that by the blessings of rain and plentiful crops God had not left Himself without a witness.

These passages suggest that man can arrive at and acquire certain bits of information about God and his existence in nature and within history. His abilities enable him to understand his own nature and status better. There are also certain inferences he can draw with respect to God. But they provide no access to God Himself. It is best, therefore, to think of general revelation as including such matters as a universal feeling of a need to worship, the concern with social order, an interest in organization, the faculty for language. (43) All of these things tend to remind man himself of his creatureliness and dependence on divine providence. There is here no confrontation with God Himself, especially not in His redemptive purposes.

III. Content and Purpose of Revelation

We have indicated again and again that the content of the Biblical revelation is God Himself in His redemptive activity. We might put this another way and say that the Bible is the record of those events which unfold God's gracious favor. The New Testament uses the term *eudokia* for this concept of God's good pleasure. From the frequent use of this term we would have to conclude that an interpretation of any given text is made "according to the Scriptures" when the passage under discussion is brought into relationship with the unifying theme of Scripture as the story of God's dealing with His people. (44) In fact, it is this particular awareness of God's "good favor" that provides the prophetic thrust of the history given in the Scriptures. (45) This is what removes ambivalence from the individual occurrences recorded and gives them meaning, thus creating history.

The continuity of this account may be observed in the Scriptural use of the concept "inheritance," which is used to carry forward the thought of God's promises, until they are fulfilled and even until they are brought to their consummation at the end of time. These promises become articulate particularly at the time of Abraham.

Before the patriarch's name was changed, while he still was known as Abram, he was given the assurance (Gen 12, 5) that he would inherit the land of Canaan. This promise was expanded when he was given the name of Abraham (Gen. 17) and especially after he had demonstrated his obedience to God by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. To the original promise was added the statement that in Abraham's seed all the nations would be blessed. From there the story gradually unfolds. Abraham's descendants conquer Canaan under Joshua. This particular land becomes Israel's *nachalah* (inheritance). God's early word to Abraham is fulfilled. In time the expansion of the original promise comes into its own. The prophets turn the concept of Israel's inheritance into an eschatological hope. They speak of a new age, when a highway will run from Egypt through Canaan to Assyria, and

Israel's ancient enemies will join her in the worship of the true God. (46) These words of the Lord begin to be fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus and especially with the creation of the church. This new Israel also has its Canaan to conquer, under a new Joshua (Jesus). It has the task once committed to God's ancient people: to extend the borders of His kingdom until the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

This inheritance is described in Matthew 24, 34 as something God had decided on before history began. We shall reach it when history ends. What lies in between is the story of God's "good pleasure" as an implicate of history. As such it is recorded and witnessed to in the Scriptures, which, in the words of Emil Brunner, describes "the parabola of redemption." This is the content of Biblical revelation.

The Scriptures also use the word "glory" (doxa) to refer to the content of revelation. The term is often intimately associated with our Lord's return, the parousia. In this kind of context apokalypsis signifies the final unveiling of God in His full splendor. Doxa, however, is also used of the veiled glory of God's presence among His people. It is the word used in the Septuagint for the Hebrew shekinah, the cloud of God's presence. It applies to the hidden splendor of our Lord's ministry, of which the evangelist observes, "We saw His glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father; full of grace and truth" (John 1, 14). This presence of God continues in the church by the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. These constitute the place of God's glory, the means by which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself as the down-payment (arrabon) of that fuller splendor of which we have been assured. Once again, the content of revelation turns out to be God Himself.

We must mention the word mystery in this connection. In its Old Testament environment the word may have referred to heavenly councils of angels assembled at the request of the Lord to hear His decisions. This is quite possibly what Amos had in mind when he spoke of the mysteries of God being revealed to the prophets (Amos 3). He uses the term to suggest that somehow the prophets were given the privilege of having listened in on the proceedings of these heavenly assemblies.

"Mystery" is a word of revelation, but in a different sense from our term "secret." Once a secret is revealed among men, it is no longer a secret. In the Scriptures, however, God is a self-disclosing mystery in the sense that as He unveils Himself He does so by hiding Himself, especially in the lowly form of the Suffering Servant. At some points Christ Himself is spoken of as this mystery. In one context Paul speaks of the incorporation of the Gentiles as the mystery hidden from previous ages but revealed in the New Testament age. But even as this mystery of God's action toward the Gentiles is unveiled it remains hidden. It is really without explanation except as a creative act of God, a divine dabhar, the forward thrust of His ancient Exodus word.

The Scriptures do not leave us in any doubt whatsoever as to the purpose of revelation. In revelation God offers us Himself in fellowship. When men accept this offer, the experience is called "salvation" (soteria). This term, like its twin, "redemption" (apolutrosis), is another concept used by the Scriptures to indicate the content of revelation. As such, it embodies the whole account of God's mighty acts done to set us free from sin and death. Where these enemies of mankind have been overcome there is life (Zoe). This life was made manifest particularly in Jesus Christ, of whom the prologue to the Gospel according to St. John says in so many words, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (1, 4). He was and is life not because He assured men that there is no death but because He overcame death. Revelation is event and not just words.

In disclosing Himself, God is seen as intent on reestablishing His rule over and among men. The New Testament phrase for this is the "kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven." Now, although this precise expression does not occur in the Old Testament, as an historical reality, the idea goes back to the time of Mt. Sinai, where God chose a lowly race of slaves to be His "kingdom of priests."

God intervened in history at this point to create for Himself a community that would serve and honor Him. Among this people He chose to dwell; here His will was to rule supreme. Moreover, Israel was to serve as the instrument for extending the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth. This was the essence of the covenant Yahweh made with Israel, unilaterally and in grace. Israel was sure that the Lord had revealed Himself in the mighty act of liberation known as the Exodus. His will was made known from Mt. Sinai. The terms of the covenant were offered; and this people responded with the promise, "we will obey!"

Obtaining this reaction of obedience closes the circle of effectual revelation. In any act of self-disclosure God intends to break through to create the response of faith. A word of God, therefore, cannot be thought of apart from God's purpose of communication. Such a word does not really exist in a vacuum. God does not talk to Himself. By its very nature a word, an action of His, has to do with a person-to-person relationship created between Him and us.

The Exodus was God's great dabhar of choosing a community for service and obedience. To be sure, Israel soon grumbled and even rebelled. This does not detract, however, from the fact that as He acted in redemption God had in mind the reestablishment of His rule over and among men.

In time, only a remnant in Israel lived in faith and obedience. Then God began to identify Himself in His saving purposes with this minority group. In the fullness of time the true Israel, Jesus the Christ, was born among the members of this remnant. When He entered His public ministry, He at once began to proclaim the presence of God's rule in His own person. He gathered the true around Himself and promised to make these disciples His church, to create a new Israel, with the Twelve disciples as the patriarchs of a new people of God. Jesus, then, is God's greatest dabhar, His mightiest act.

The individuals gathered around Jesus were known as His disciples. They had not chosen Him; He had selected them. In this respect Jesus was not like other rabbis, even though He was at times called "teacher." Those who followed Him did so not on their own initiative but because they had been called out of Israel to serve as the nucleus of a new community.

The church was to be a new phenomenon, the fulfillment of Jeremiah's vision that the days would come when God would arrange for a new covenant, a time of forgiveness, an age when God's spirit would dwell in the hearts of men. The revelation recorded for us in the Scriptures has this development in mind from the beginning: a redeemed community gathered in the presence of God, who by a mighty dabhar has brought it into being. From the outset God's acts carried this forward thrust. There is even now an open future for His people. The days of fulfillment are come, to be sure. But we now await the consummation in God's good time.

In the meantime, God's revelation has called us to a transformed life within His community--a life of forgiveness, patience, longsuffering subjection, humility, unity and love.

In the very life of the church God is at work; for it, too, is the product of His mighty acts. In a very real sense, the church is God's dabhar, unveiling before men a quality of life unknown apart from God's gracious favor. Among this people, God is active in His audible and visible Word, revealing Himself as a God who would have all men not only to see but to perceive, not only to hear but especially to obey.

NOTES

1. Lutheran Cyclopedia (1954), p. 513.
2. As for instance R. Rothe did in his Dogmatik of 1863, p. 238.
3. A quotation from A. Piper's God in History (p. 153) seems apropos to this point: "At a time, for example, when the Protestant church had practically forgotten that the Lord Himself leads His church into all truth, and when those who still clung to the truth indulged in the worship of the letter of the Bible, God allowed higher criticism to unmask the arbitrariness in this practice and to refute the theories which were meant to justify it."
4. In this connection note the article "Luther on the Word of God" in The Minnesota Lutheran, November 1958, pp. 16-25, which is a district essay read by Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan.
5. Cf. John Baillie, The Idea of Revelation, pp. 22-24.
6. Cf. 1 Corinthians 13, 12 and Galatians 4, 9.
7. Jeremiah 23, 28.
8. Cf. Exodus 33, 23.
9. Joshua 24, 6: "Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea..." Note also the Passover Haggadah as discussed from this point of view in W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, pp. 102ff. Note further David Daube's application of the Haggadah form to Mark 12, 1-34 in NTS, 5, 174-187.
10. A. J. Heschel, Essays Presented to Leo Baeck, p. 29.
11. Cf. 1 Samuel 9.
12. Cf. Genesis 32, 32.
13. Cf. Isaiah 52, 7.
14. Cf. Mark 1, 14.
15. The full discussion is given under the term kalupto in vol. III, pp. 563-597. The particular sentence quoted here occurs on page 575.
16. Cf. Oepke, KTHW, III, p. 596: "Die Selbstdarbietung des Vaters Jesu Christi zur Gemeinschaft."
17. Thomas covers this matter in Part I of the Summa. His answer to question 1, for example, says, "Necessarium fuit, praeter philosophicas disciplinas, quae per rationem investigantur, sacram doctrinam per revelationem haberi." (italics mine).

18. This is certainly the significance of Luther's criterion that the revelatory quality of each part of the Bible is to be judged according to the measure in which it "Christum treibet."
19. Cf. H. Richard Nieburh, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 13: "But our historical revelativism affirms the historicity of the subject even more than that of the object; man is not only in time, but time is in man..."
20. Cf. John Baillie, op. cit., p. 21.
21. Cf. Emil Brunner, Offenbarung und Vernunft, p. 25.
22. Weimar Ausgabe, Tischreden, I, 364. The whole statement reads: "The writer of Chronicles noted only the summary and chief stories and events. Whatever is less important and immaterial he passed by. For this reason the books of Kings are more credible than the Chronicles. (Transl. in Reu, Luther and the Scriptures, p. 72.)
23. WA, 23, 642, 23ff.: "Matthew does not have the correct name... What does it matter if he does not give the name exactly, because more depends on the words than on the name..." (Reu, Luther and the Scriptures, p. 88.)
24. Vol. VI, p. 345.
25. E. C. Blackman, Biblical Interpretation, p. 25.
26. Cf. the subtitle to G. Ernest Wright's The God Who Acts. Note here Micah 6, 4-5: "O my people, remember... what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."-- On the unity of word and work note J. D. A. Macnicol's remark, "God's fiat and His effective action are one," in Word and Deed in the OT, "Scottish Journal of Theology, V, 3 (Sept. 52), p. 247.
27. "The priestly source uses the term 'ed, stressing the liturgical nature of the Israelite community." Carroll Stuhlmueller, "The Influence of Oral Tradition Upon Exegesis" in CBQ, July 1958, p. 310, footnote.
28. Cf. Exodus 14, 18: "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh..."
29. In this connection it should be noted that the Gnostic heresy consisted partly of a massive attempt to cut Christianity loose from its moorings in history.
30. L. S. Thornton, Revelation and the Modern World, p. 139, lists the following three aspects of recapitulation: 1) repetition of events; 2) unity of process; 3) repetition of process.
31. Matthew 2, 15.

32. "Goethe used the metaphor of the 'roaring loom of time' on which the Time-Spirit weaves the garment by which God is made visible. Our aim should be to learn as much as we can of the very shape and texture of that garment, as it was woven by Hebrew hands and minds. For this is what gives the peculiar quality of the 'revelation' constituted by the Old Testament." H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation, p. 63. -- It may be helpful in this connection to add a statement from John McIntyre's The Christian Doctrine of History, p. 6: "...Our generation has found historical thought to be one of the most intelligible vehicles of the Christian faith."
33. Cf. Erik Sjoeborg, ZNW, 1957, "Das offene Grab."
34. F.W. Maitland's oft-quoted dictum: "The essential matter of history is not what happened but what people thought and said about it." This is given in Baillie, op. cit., p. 67.--On event Martin Buber remarks in Moses, p. 16: "Here history cannot be dis severed from the historical wonder; but the experience which has been transmitted to us, the experience of event as wonder (*italics mine*), is itself great history and must be understood out of the element of history; it has to be fitted in the framework of the historical."
35. For example, there is no reference to the devil in chapter 3 of Genesis: only the serpent is mentioned. We interpret this to represent the devil, because the serpent was a symbol of evil in all the cultures of the Near East, including Israel. Later Bible passages, of course, help us here.
36. "Revelation is an event that destroys death, not a doctrine that death does not exist." Bultman, Der Begriff der Offenbarung im NT, p. 22, note 5. --"For the record itself is not itself revelation; it is the record, set down by men in the illumination supplied by their knowledge of God, of the facts wherein the revelation was given." William Temple in Revelation, p. 91, as edited by John Baillie the Hugh Martin (Macmillan, 1937). Cf. Romans 3, 21.
37. J. A. Allan, Galatians (Torch Series), p. 54.
38. In fact Bengel describes theopneustos in just this way as he discusses 2 Timothy 3, 16 in his Gnomon: *Divinitus, inspirata est non solum dum scripta est, Deo spirante per scriptores; sed etiam, dum legitur, Deo spirante per scripturam, et scriptura ipsum spirante. Hinc ea tam utilis.*"
39. That this posed a problem early in the church's history can be seen from the fact that a few of the Old Latin manuscripts add "et spiritui sancto" to Luke's statement (1, 3) that it seemed too good to him to compose a Gospel account.
40. This is certainly the force of *en* in both Romans 1, 2 and Hebrews 1, 1. Much the same might be said of the *dia* in Romans 15, 26, although, of course, this doxology presents special textual problems.
41. Cf. Oscar Cullmann's treatment of the distinction between apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition in The Early Church, pp. 59-99.

42. The NT plea of Revelation, p. 39.
43. Cf. H. P. Owen, "The Scope of Natural Revelation," NTS, 5, 2, 133-143. Also O. A. Piper, God in History, p. 66.
44. Cf. Hermann Diem, Was Heisst Schriftgemaess?, Neukirchen 1958, p. 20: "...die Geschichte der Selbsterschliessung Gottes in seiner Offenbarung, in der sich sein Ratschluss verwirklicht."
45. "It is prophecy that makes history." John McIntyre, The Christian Doctrine of History, p. 19.
46. Isaiah 19, 23.

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THE BIBLE AS RECORD, WITNESS AND MEDIUM
Martin H. Scharlemann

No segment of contemporary Christendom has been able to escape the haunting question, "In what sense is the Bible the Word of God?" This is a rather new problem. Before the nineteenth century of our era it would hardly have occurred to any one even to raise the issue. The answer to the query seemed to be self-evident.

Until the middle of the last century the main body of Bible readers remained undisturbed in their conviction that somehow the Scriptures of the church were so unique, not only in their content and form but also in terms of their origin, that, for all practical purposes, it was hardly necessary to be concerned with the historic circumstances surrounding the creative persons and forces that went into the making of the individual Biblical documents. Christians generally thought of their Bible as springing almost full-grown from a single inspired session of the various sacred authors.

Occasionally, to be sure, there was a passing reference to possible research and investigation on the part of one or the other writer. Just as a case in point, in the middle of the seventeenth century, Johann Konrad Dannhauer, used the special term aspiratio for this aspect of the total divine action which caused the Scriptures to be written. (1) But no one had as yet suggested that the Pentateuch might owe its contents to various documentary sources and/or to the oral traditions of a religious community. The Bible was conceived to be God's Word in the sense that its separate parts had come into being very directly and uniquely by a special impulse of the Holy Spirit working on and with each author, transporting him to some timeless mountain to from which it was possible to view, even if but for a moment, the promised land of heavenly mysteries. It was obvious, of course, that the Spirit had not destroyed the personality of the Individual author. No responsible theologian really thought of inspiration as a purely mechanical process. And yet the Scriptural documents were studied as though they had come into being in an almost complete historical and literary vacuum. In point of fact some theologians were willing to go so far as to say that the Scriptures, because of their inspired nature, could contain neither anakoluta nor solecisms, that the koine of the New Testament for example, was a special "language of the Holy Ghost." (2) The only virtue in such a point of view is its utter consistency with a basic assumption that is completely false.

Here, too, the age of the Enlightenment challenged the easy assumptions of previous centuries. To be sure, at first the rationalistic approach of the eighteenth century left the main stream of Biblical scholarship unaffected. However, in subsequent years various archaeological discoveries helped to illumine the life and times of Biblical antiquity. Documents from religions practiced outside of but contemporary with the life and worship of ancient Israel established the degree to which Old Testament concepts were not only different from but similar to those "of other Near Eastern cultures. Moreover, the science of philology made it possible to determine various stages and periods in the development of the Hebrew and Greek languages. All of this new knowledge added to a growing awareness that in many respects, the church's Scriptures were to a large degree quite human books, and that they had come into being in contact with, rather than in isolation from, the total religious and intellectual milieu of the ancient Near East, in the instance of the Old Testament, and of the Graeco-Roman world, in the case of the New.

Something of a milestone in the field of Biblical interpretation was reached in 1860. In that year six Anglican clergymen published a volume entitled [Essays and Reviews](#). In it they very frankly conceded many points to the critical ideas that had been advocated in Germany for some decades previously. Immediately John William Burgon, Dean of Chichester, and the champion of a long series of lost cases, countered this new approach with a book of his own, known as [Inspiration and Interpretation](#). He made no concessions of any kind to the new ideas. The battle was joined. The Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy was on, confronting the church with the most serious test it has had to face in its history. The conflict began to embroil American church life toward the end of the nineteenth and especially in the early decades of the twentieth century.

As one might expect, neither side in this acrimonious debate was completely right. This much is generally conceded today. By now both extremes have moved somewhat nearer the center of the discussion. As a consequence there has, on the one hand, developed a greater sense of reverence for the Scriptures among those who would reckon themselves to be the descendants of liberalism. Fundamentalism helped to keep alive this necessary and wholesome emphasis on the attitude of reverence required of anyone who handled the Scriptures. On the other side, even extremely conservative Bible students and interpreters hardly hesitate to concede today that many human factors, beyond those of the literary style and intellectual acumen of the individual sacred author, must be taken into account for any proper understanding and appreciation of the Bible. This awareness of the infinite complexity involved in Biblical interpretation is liberalism's finest contribution to this whole field of investigation. (3)

Out of this mutual respect there has come about a growing consensus that the Bible is in essence a uniquely inspired account of those events in the sacred past by which God proposes to communicate even now with us who are His creatures and children. This insight constitutes a great gain for the art of Biblical interpretation. It has brought to light a dimension in the Scriptural documents that had previously been noticed only in rare moments of special illumination by individual giants such as Martin Luther. (4) We may, therefore, confidently speak of the Bible as the record of and witness to the saving will and redemptive activity of God. It is in this way that the Scriptures serve as a medium of revelation in every generation.

Now, "revelation" is a term used for both the fact and the method by which God makes Himself known to men. The word itself, however, is not to be thought of as a purely theological concept. It has some philosophical overtones, derived from the whole question as to the limits and validity of human knowledge. (5) The Scriptures themselves do not raise this particular issue as a problem in epistemology but rather as an aspect of our existence. In their view, man cannot discover God by any devices of his own. God must disclose Himself if there is to be any knowledge of Him. God is never an inference from anything for any Biblical author; He is always the initiator. In one sense, of course, He is the object of human understanding and faith, but to a much greater degree God always remains the subject of revelation. We know Him only as we are known by Him. (6) It may be useful, therefore, at this point to consider the whole concept of revelation as we meet it in our sacred Scriptures.

This kind of approach to the problem begins by conceding the existence of what is at times referred to as the first hermeneutical circle. This implies that there is no way in which any document can be interpreted properly from the outside. Any interpreter, whether he works with a modern legal brief or with an ancient Homeric poem, must take the material under study on its own terms. This applies to the art of Biblical interpretation to an even greater degree because the categories and dimensions employed by the sacred writers are beyond the reach of ordinary

experience. The procedure of analyzing the concept of revelation as it is used and described within the frame of reference created by the Scriptures themselves should, therefore, provide some assurance of adequacy rather than constituting a source of embarrassment. No apologies are necessary for working within this circle, particularly in view of the Biblical insistence that the revelation of which it is the record and to which it testifies is so absolute that there is no external test by which it can be either validated or authenticated. There is, in fact, no criterion apart from revelation itself by which it can be evaluated.

I. The Concept of Revelation

The Biblical contribution to the philosophical inquiry concerning the limits of man's cognitive faculty is its insistence that in those things of God which really matter man can only be ignorant. For He is a God that "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6,16) There is no way of bridging the deep chasm between men as creatures and God as their creator except on the initiative of the latter. "Truly," said the prophet, "Thou art a God who hidest Thyself" (Is. 45,15). It is obvious, therefore, that in this kind of context the term "revelation" occurs in a much more profound sense than in such a purely secular announcement as might well appear in our daily newspapers, "Today the White House revealed that a committee of experts had been appointed to consider certain matters of vital concern to the nation. " In both instances, however, the idea at the very heart of the concept is that of disclosure rather than of discovery.

From the Biblical point of view, then, revelation is a term to remind us of the limitations placed on our ability to know God or anything about Him. We cannot know Him; He must disclose Himself to us. The Scriptures move on, however, to assert that we have not been left in ignorance, but that God has revealed Himself to men, not in His absolute essence, to be sure, but in terms of a personal relationship to specific persons and to a particular people at certain moments in history. In fact, the greatest revelation we have of God is His Son, born as a descendant of the house of David, but known as the Logos for the reason that He is the principal instrument of God's disclosure of Himself. "No man has seen God at any time," the fourth evangelist has Jesus saying ' "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." (John 1,18)

For any attempt to interpret the Scriptures, an awareness of the fact that God never ceases to be the subject of revelation is of extreme significance. For this implies that we must expect nothing less than a confrontation with God Himself as we study and expound the record of His redemptive activity. Any other kind of knowledge of God is to revelation as chaff is to wheat. (7) Our abiding responsibility in Biblical interpretation, therefore, is to proceed beyond the analysis of verbal propositions and conceptual images to that of listening in obedience to God's claims on us as they sound forth from the events recorded in and witnessed to in the Biblical documents. This means that the ultimate dimension of truth as it applies to us in our relationship with God is not to be found in the formulations of Scripture but in the actions of God described and interpreted there. In a very urgent sense, therefore, the art of interpretation requires ears to hear, lest we hear and understand not. For it is always possible to believe every statement made in the Scriptures without actually confronting the truth they propose to communicate.

In this connection it will be useful to have a look at some of the phrases and words used by the sacred authors as they take cognizance of this whole matter of: revelation. We

shall begin with the Old Testament; and, after we have considered a few of the more significant Old Testament expressions, we shall proceed to an analysis of some of the crucial terms used in the New for the fact and process of God's self-disclosure.

It is not a simple matter to set forth what the Old Testament teaches on the subject of revelation. It assumes, of course, that men are in contact with God only where He Himself has broken in to offer Himself in communion. Whatever men get to know of God in this way, however, always remains fragmentary. At no time did God manifest Himself in His full majesty. His celestial splendor remained hidden even when He appeared in a bright cloud. For, as the Deuteronomic writer puts it, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God," even though, as he adds, "the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." (Dt. 29,28)

At one point, we are told, Moses was not quite content to have only God's revealed presence attend Israel through the desert. The Hebrew of Exodus chapter 33 uses the word "face" for God's presence at this point. This noun suggests that God dealt as a person with men as persons on these occasions when He revealed Himself. It implies, moreover, that God disclosed only so much of His being as He chose to make visible or audible in a particular situation.

Moses was not satisfied with this kind of manifestation. He asked for more. In fact, he was bold enough to request the privilege of seeing God in His full splendor. This privilege, however, was denied him on the grounds that no human being can at any time see God in His absolute majesty and still live.

Yet Moses was given the privilege of seeing the Lord's goodness pass in review. That is to say, Israel's great leader was given a glimpse of all the mercy and grace God had in store for His people. This is the Biblical way of describing God as revealing Himself in those historic events which occurred to implement God's redemptive will and purpose for Israel. In these acts God's transcendence became imminent. In them we can see God, but only His back parts, as the Exodus account has it. (8)

Some years before this the angel of the Lord had appeared to Moses, as we read, in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. On that occasion God had revealed His Name as being "I Am That I Am," rendered in the Septuagint by a masculine participle as "I am the (personally) existent One." This almost untranslatable Hebrew imperfect may also be rendered as "I Will be That I will Be." It is an open tense, so to speak, suggesting that even though God chose to disclose Himself at particular moments in specific places, yet, unlike the deities of other nations, He was bound neither to time nor to place. He is the God not only of Mount Sinai, but also of Mount Nebo and Mount Zion—and of Calvary, for that matter. He is the God of Moses and of Joshua even as he had been Abraham's Lord.

This abiding transcendence of God is brought out most clearly in the opening words of the speech Solomon delivered at the dedication of the Temple as a place for God "to dwell in forever." (1 Kings 8,13) This edifice had been erected according to Phoenician blueprints, oriented to the solar system. However, lest any one conclude from all this that Yahweh might be no more than the sun god, Solomon began his remarks—and here the Revised Standard Version has quite appropriately taken a reading from some Septuagint manuscripts into its text—Solomon started his remarks by saying, "The Lord (Yahweh) has set the sun in the heavens." In other words, Yahweh is not a part of the solar system; He is no less than its Creator. What is more, Solomon added, God "has said that he would dwell in thick darkness."

Here the Hebrew verb for "to dwell" means "to alight for the night." In the Septuagint it is rendered as skeenoun, which means "to tent." It is a specific reference to that presence of God among His people which was signified by the Tabernacle. To be sure, the days of the Tent of Meeting had come to an end; Solomon had been permitted to erect a more permanent house to the Lord. Despite this fact Solomon himself meant to insist that God's presence ranged beyond both the Temple as a building and the moment of its dedication as a place of worship.

Solomon pointed out that God had chosen to dwell in thick darkness. On the one hand, this was a reference to the presence of the ark in the windowless room known as the Holy of Holies. On the other, this is the language of dynamic symbolism, meant to describe the awesome mystery of God's gracious presence in the midst of His people. Here was an act of revelation and yet God remained hidden. This serves as a reminder of the fact that the comprehension of man is unequal to the task of putting fully into words what God has done to break the silence of eternity.

An awareness of God's undiminished transcendence has a bearing on the art of Biblical interpretation. Whatever the Scriptures record of God's activity is so put as to forestall any thought that He can be contained in either place, time, logic, or language. The Biblical exegete, in other words, has the task of handling materials that deal with such divine realities as do indeed reach down into space and time and yet never become fully a part of it. God's ways are never completely captured in a formulation, whether it be a perfect deduction or a neatly structured syllogism. This is another way of saying that God always remains the subject of revelation even at the moment when He offers Himself to men in communion. In any relationship He creates in terms of revelation, God is never less than God.

God has revealed Himself in His redemptive activity as a person who moves along a line, as history does, and not in a circle in the manner of nature. This means that past, present, and future are an essential element in God's dealings with men. He is the God of promise, faithful in fulfilling His purposes at a point later than the original statement. He is the same yesterday, today and forever in the sense that He remains constant and dependable in keeping His word. His actions, bound as they, are to a particular occurrence in the past, always contain a forward thrust. They point beyond themselves as events which have continuing relevance for God's people and so are to be remembered by each successive generation. (9)

Since these occurrences take place on the plane of history, God's acts are not repeated in precisely the same way. Yet there was repetition in the commemoration and interpretation put on these events by the worship of Israel, both in the desert and later in the Promised Land. Each year the great festivals served to remind Israel of what God had done for His people, and what He expected from them by way of response. Israel's liturgical life was cyclical in its motion; and yet these cycles moved forward along a line into an open future. They provided the occasion for reinterpreting life and history at the hand of those acts of God that constituted the creed of Israel. In this way Israel's worship was unique; for it had as the object of its adoration none other than the Lord of history and nature, that God who could never be contained within the structures of men, whose purposes were made more clear as the years rolled by. Precisely for this reason God's self-disclosure defies adequate definition. For, as Pascal once put it, God is not the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. He reveals Himself as the living God, moving through space and time to accomplish His purposes within the context of our history.

Now, it is no less than Himself that God disclosed to His children of old. On this point the instance of Samuel may be instructive. When he was still young, the word of the Lord was rare in Israel, the account tells us. (1 Sam. 3,1) Samuel himself did not yet know the Lord, because, as the sacred writer puts it, "the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." (3,7) Here the concepts word, revelation, and knowledge occur together and in a certain sequence. God had chosen to remain hidden for a time. No word came from Him. No action of His broke into the dreary routine of Israel's life. Each new day was like yesterday, despite the ritual at Shiloh. Samuel, too, remained without knowledge of God until the latter chose to manifest Himself to his servant.

And how did the Word of the Lord come to Samuel? When God called him by name in the darkness of the night, as one person addresses another. Revelation is essentially a dialog, in which God directs Himself to man in order to elicit an obedient response of the kind reflected in Samuel's answer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." (3,10) Later on in the same chapter this word from the Lord is specifically referred to as God's revelation, of Himself. We read, in verse 21, "The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by a word of the Lord." He called into the night not only to choose Samuel as His prophet but to unfold His intent with Israel. And so "the word of Samuel came to all Israel," we read.

Revelation, then, is at times described as a process of God speaking to individuals. He said to Abraham, for instance, "Go from your country and your kindred..." (Gen. 12,1) We read of Him speaking to Moses again and again. Just what kind of experiences such expressions are intended to describe is impossible to ascertain. In fact, such a question was of no interest at all to the sacred authors. They used this particular language to show that there are two poles in any act of revelation, God and man, and that God Himself must speak in order to break through in communion with His creatures. God does not contain Himself within the silence of eternity, but projects Himself into our history in order to communicate with man. He comes forward, so to speak. He shows His hand to intervene savingly for mankind.

That such contact with God at His calling requires a dimension of language which ranges above the vocabulary used to describe ordinary observations and experiences is evident from the description Isaiah gives us of the vision by which he was called to become God's prophet. "In the year that king Uzziah died, " he wrote, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up..." (6,1) This sentence opens with the language of straight chronicle. The rest of the chapter, however, bursts through the two-dimensional vocabulary of normal human experience to depict God breaking into the life of an individual for the purpose of unfolding His saving purposes. Here we are in the area of revelation; its language comes in three dimensions.

This differentiation in vocabulary has to be kept in mind by the interpreter of the Bible, particularly in our age. We are all familiar with the linear process of reasoning and even with the dimension of breadth by which we add substance and content to our logical structures. But our secularized age is almost entirely unfamiliar with the concept of depth in language, the dimension of intuition, artistic creation, of poetry, and of revelation. Our culture is much too content to work without giving thought to life in its fullness. Our ordinary use of language is ascetic, depriving itself of the words that deal with the level of ultimate meaning. In revealing Himself, however, God proposes to communicate to us in our total existence.

The process of discrimination in language has been at work in our culture since the days of the Renaissance. Before the modern era, little thought was given to the fact that there are various kinds of language. Books on astrology and alchemy dating from the Middle ages, just by way of illustration, make an indiscriminate use of vocabulary. Theological, mythical, poetic and scientific words are used in the same paragraph, even in the same sentence, as though they all belonged to the same category. In interpreting the Scriptures we must keep in mind that these documents came into being long before language began to suffer from a process that might be described as one of dismantling. The Biblical writers did not work with linguistic and conceptual constructs such as our age lives with each day.

It is well nigh impossible, therefore, to interpret the Scriptural documents in such a way as to make them sound contemporary with us. In fact, any exegetical effort has to take the opposite direction. That is to say, it has the task of breaking out of our normal two-dimensional existence and handling concepts and ideas that derive from another level of life. Our everyday language is much too shallow to contain the Biblical revelation without major and even fatal adjustments. We might compare the terminology with which our secular culture works to a Mercator map. It is impossible to squeeze a polar map or a globe into its narrow limits. There is no room on it for the extra dimension. The Biblical interpreter will find that trying to reduce the language of revelation to the level of the stunted vocabulary of our culture resembles an attempt to get a cube to fit into a square space. In point of fact the status of the Bible in modern life amounts almost to this that it is a great answer to a question that men no longer know how to ask. [\(10\)](#)

Here we confront the basic fallacy inherent in any suggestion that we must demythologize our Scriptures. In point of fact, we must find room in our language and in our thought for the experience and content of divine revelation in its full claim. As we interpret the Scriptures, therefore, we must follow the apostle Peter in saying, as he did on Pentecost day, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet..." (Acts 2,16) That is to say, the Biblical interpreter of our day has the task of unfolding the vast range of images, concepts and words of revelation in their full Biblical context and intent by inculcating an understanding of the total world-view of the sacred authors. Only then may he address himself to the question, of contemporary relevance.

Our Scriptures speak of revelation as God's act of breaking into the closed circle of our existence for the purpose of making Himself known as the Lord of all life, all history and all nature. A rather common expression for God's approach to man is the phrase, "The word of the Lord came to...". Jeremiah, for example, begins his book by, describing its contents as consisting of his own words, spoken and written in response to the word of the Lord that had come to him saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were I consecrated you..." (1, 5) It is of the utmost importance to note that what we have in this book is described in the opening verse as Jeremiah's own verbalizations of divine insights into personal and historic situations that came to him as separate acts or words from the Lord. In interpreting this document, therefore, we must be mindful of the prophet's own insistence that what we are reading are his words, put down by him, under divine impulse, to be sure, in order to describe his encounters with the Lord God on those occasions when God befell him, so to speak, with a word. It is from within this kind of experience that another great prophet, Isaiah, the son of Amoz, could declare that he saw the word of the Lord. (2,1) It met his eyes, because the word of the Lord is in the last analysis God Himself confronting an individ

That specific words may be part of God's revelation is certainly the significance of the account we have of God giving His Law on Mt. Sinai. (Ex. 20,1-7) It should be noted, however, that even these "ten words" are preceded by God's disclosure of Himself as the God who had brought Israel out of the house of bondage. We have the "I am" before the "Thou shalt." That there was revelation through words as well as through acts is evident from such prophetic passages as Isaiah chapters 1 to 5 as contrasted with chapters 6 to 10. Purely predictive utterances, without reference to actual events, are given in the Biblical record; they occur, however, within the context of God's great act of having created Israel as His people. They have meaning only on the background of God's greatest dabhar in the Old Testament: the Exodus. Even though words may be involved in the act of revelation, or even constitute the revelation, it is not just the ears that are considered to be the channels of communication. On the contrary, God is depicted as addressing Himself to the whole man, even though the individual text under consideration may stress the hearing of the word of God.

In Biblical thought, then, revelation is the self-disclosure of God as a personal being to man as a person, that is to say, in action. Revelation, therefore, is not primarily a method of transmitting a body of information. Quite the contrary, God reveals His being as it relates to men by what He does and by the intent and manner of His activity. The impartation of supernatural knowledge, especially of the future, may indeed occur. But this is always secondary to the main theme. The incident of Saul looking for his father's donkeys (11) is illuminating in this connection. For when Saul came to Samuel to inquire about the donkeys, the answer concerned God's plans for His people. This concern for His Israel always remains the subject of revelation. No interpreter, therefore, will ever be able to manipulate the word of God, as he might master the content of a theorem in geometry. For the Lord Himself is always active in and through His word. He acts; His word is in essence not a noun but a verb. God is always its acting subject. He directs itself to us; we can only respond to His self-disclosure. We can never capture it; it always befalls us, touching the hollow of our thigh, as it were. (12)

All this is clear from the Old Testament statements which deal with this matter. To this the New Testament adds its own ringing testimony. To be sure, there is no single term, either in the Old Testament or in the New, that corresponds precisely to our English term "revelation," with its philosophical concerns. Yet the New Testament, like the Old, insists that the "traffic of Jacob's ladder" starts at the top.

At this point two words from the New Testament need to be considered in some detail. They are apokalypsis and phaneroosis, both of which are normally used to connote God's act of self-disclosure, both within history and at the end of time. The second of these two terms, we might add, is almost invariably used in contexts where time itself is an item of consequence.

Two passages, one from St. Peter the other from St. Paul, may be cited to indicate the prime significance of phanerosis as God's action of unveiling within history what had been decided on in eternity. The first reference is to 1 Peter 1,19-20 which reads, "But you were set free by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and blemish, chosen for this purpose before the world was founded, but manifested at the end of the ages..." Here we have a very direct statement describing the relationship between God's decision of grace before time began and the historic events by which His will and person were made known. This passage is a reminder, at the same time, of the fact that the Incarnation did not burst upon the vision of men unannounced. In fact, there is a very clear reference here to the slaying of the yearly passover lamb in Israel as an action pointing beyond itself to fulfillment at the end of the ages in a person who would suffer the same fate and for the same reason. An event in

time, then, became the vehicle for revealing God's will and grace in Him whom we know as the Logos, God's expression of Himself. We must note especially that it was Christ Himself whom God revealed. The revelation did not consist of some teaching or idea about Him, but the very person of the Messiah.

The method of revelation, including both promise and fulfillment, are the burden also of a passage from St. Paul. It is found in the third chapter of his letter to the Romans. There, beginning with the twenty-first verse, we have this striking remark, illustrating the proper use of the verb phaneroo: "In this present age, however, God's righteousness has been made manifest, as it was testified to by the law and the prophets..." Then there follows a description of what God did to make Himself plain as personally righteous and eager to declare men righteous on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus. Two steps in God's action are mentioned specifically: In eternity He decided that Christ Jesus should be the mercy-seat for men; and this decision was made manifest, it was realized, when Jesus shed His blood.

This event, in the language of St. Paul, was to accomplish a dual purpose. On the one hand, it was to help solve the puzzle of God's patience in dealing rather lightly with sins committed in days gone by; on the other, it was to show the extent to which God was willing to reach down among men in a desire for fellowship and communion. Just because God is righteous, Paul tells us, He set off the series of events by which He proposed to redeem men for service to Himself. The righteousness of God is just this determination of His to break out of His own isolation, so to speak, for the purpose of creating contact with His creatures on the basis of mercy and grace. It is in this way that the silence of eternity was and is filled with the sound of God's condescension.

A second word that occurs in the New Testament to give expression to the thought of revelation is apokalypsis. Quite frequently this term occurs in a context dealing with the parousia, the appearance of Jesus. Christ in His heavenly splendor at the end of time. There are a few passages, however, where the verb occurs in the present tense with reference to what is taking place right now among men; Two of these are found very close together in the first chapter of Romans. In verse seventeen the term is used of God's righteousness; in the very next verse, it has reference to the disclosure of God's anger.

This double usage is very informative. It clarifies the relationship prevailing between certain occurrences and their significance as means of God's self-disclosure. God is seen in His anger when we observe how God abandons men to their own desires and designs because of their failure to follow whatever is known to them of God's existence and of His power. This statement from the apostle helps us to understand what he has in mind in saying that by the Gospel God makes known His righteousness. It is evident from the immediate context that Paul used the word "gospel" at this point not only with reference to content but in its sense of activity, the work of proclaiming the Good News. This implies that the church's preaching and teaching in succession to the apostle Paul are instruments of revelation. They are word of God. God is at work. The proclamation of the Good News is God's way of showing Himself to men as one who is anxious for communion on the basis of complete trust.

We may quarrel somewhat with the distinction Bultmann at times makes between kerygma and theology. For an understanding of revelation in its Biblical sense, however; this differentiation is useful in pointing out that the content of the Good News is God Himself as He confronts men in His royal prerogatives. In fact, the verb evangelizesthai in the Old Testament as time went on got to mean announcing the particular fact that God was king. (13) At

this point our incarnate Lord picked up the term to proclaim, "The kingdom of God is at hand." (14) That is to say, Jesus was announcing that God Himself had entered our historic context to confront men in the person of His Son as their king and to gather together into a new Israel such as would respond in faith.

All of these considerations help us to appreciate why Professor Oepke of Leipzig, in his discussion of this particular subject in Kittel's Woerterbuch, says,

"Revelation is not the communication of supernatural knowledge, and not the stimulation of numinous feelings. Revelation can indeed give rise to knowledge and is necessarily accompanied by numinous feelings; yet it does not itself consist in these things but is quite essentially the action of Yahweh, an unveiling of His essential hiddenness, His offering of Himself in fellowship." (15)

A definition such as this obviously has its consequences for epistemology, even though the problem of knowledge is never posed as such in the Scriptures. Three elements in this contemporary definition are of special interest to us at this point. In the first instance, from the Biblical point of view, revelation is God's way of offering Himself in communion. (16) This means, in the second place, that in the revelatory process a person, a supernatural being, manifests Himself to us as individual persons by the nature and purpose of the activity He has undertaken on our behalf. That is to say, we learn to know God from what He has done and still does for us. Thirdly, this revelation of the divine purpose and person comes to man, the creature, by way of the cognitive faculty with which he is endowed for the purpose of responding with his whole person to God's disclosure of Himself.

In pointing to these characteristic features of Professor Oepke's statement, we become aware of the distance we have come since the days of the neat distinction made between reason and revelation by Thomas Aquinas and those who followed him in describing revelation as having to do with a supernatural method of communicating information that was not otherwise accessible to man. In fact, Aquinas himself subdivided the knowledge available to man by divine revelation into three categories; namely, information concerning God's nature, information concerning His supra-rational works (the Incarnation and its consequences), and information concerning suprarational events to be expected at the end of earthly history. (17)

This view of revelation lingers on wherever no account is taken of the fact that man is himself a part of any cognitive relationship. A clean differentiation between reason and revelation along scholastic lines is made possible only where knowledge is thought of as being the slow absorption or digestion of a quantity of facts and truths. Where man and the body of information he is to acquire are viewed as being entirely separate and neutral entities that are brought together by following the laws of the mind, there revelation is understood to be the verbal or conceptual communication of a body of truths by divine authority. In this view the Bible gets to be primarily a source-book of information, a collection of divine truths, rather than a record of and witness of God's redemptive acts.

Thomas Aquinas made no essential distinction between such truths as are available to reason and such as man can acquire only by revelation. The former served as the basement floor leading to the first story of revealed truths. The Reformation, to be sure, professed to reject the continuity between reason and revelation. It denied that there was any way of proceeding from the level of reason to that of revelation. Knowledge, the scibile, was the proper

province of reason; faith, the credible, was the correlative of reason. Reason might be used to help explain and define divine truths. Other than this, however, it remained unconnected with revelation.

There were moments when Luther himself broke through the system and structure of thought born of this distinction between reason and revelation. He saw beyond the words and formulations not only of the church but also of the Scriptures themselves to God as He had revealed Himself in Christ at the level of personal communion rather than by way of divinely imparted truths. (18) However, these precious insights were quickly obscured in the age of Protestant orthodoxy, which chose to fight Roman Catholic theology with weapons forged out of scholastic categories and methods.

The disintegration of the scholastic and Protestant orthodox conception of revelation began with a growing awareness, hastened by the age of the Enlightenment, that the knowing or believing subject is not without influence on the content of revelation, that, in fact, the individual human being is himself a part of any cognitive relationship. (19) The discoveries of our century that both time and space are relative, and that reality is essentially dynamic have not left, the whole question of knowledge untouched. The time-honored procedure of making a more or less absolute distinction between the deliverances of the unaided intellect and the acceptance of divinely communicated information has lost most of its meaning in current theological thought. Today knowledge is viewed indeed as an activity of the mind, yet not so much in terms of creativity as of response. Knowledge, then, is thought of as being determined by its object rather than by its subject. The individual's cognition is valid only in so far as it is determined by the reality with which he is confronted. The laws of the mind, therefore, are laws for thought rather than of thought; they are laws of the reality which the human intellect attempts to know, or is invited to accept. (20)

The effect of all this on the concept of revelation must certainly be obvious, especially in the light of the fact that the content of the knowledge offered by the Scriptures is God Himself in His redemptive purpose and activity. Such revelation can only be from subject to subject, from mind to mind; it consists of God unveiling His own thoughts of grace and judgment to the human mind. This takes place only in relationship of one person to other persons.

Such a relationship defies precise analysis. It is a deeply mysterious process. Yet in the unfolding of this mystery we are assured that nothing less than God's own will and intent are being disclosed. Accordingly, in the Biblical perspective, what is revealed to us is not chiefly a body of information concerning various things of which we might otherwise be ignorant. If it is information at all, it has to do with whatever attends a glimpse into the very heart of God in His redemptive concern for us.

In a very real sense, therefore, it is impossible to speak of revelation as an objective reality, independent of personal reaction on the part of him to whom a disclosure is made. This helps to explain the Biblical usage of the term "knowledge." Knowing means standing in a personal relationship to God's manifestation of Himself. "This is life eternal," Jesus said on the night of His betrayal, "that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John 17,3) Such knowledge is not a matter of acquiring information but of being confronted with God Himself as He is revealed in His Son.

This kind of knowing stands in striking contrast to what we may refer to as natural knowledge. In the instance of the latter, a person sets out to master a body of information. In time he can begin to control and to manipulate these materials. The content of such

knowledge is subservient to the knowing subject. This can never happen in the sphere of divine revelation. To be sure, in theology we may attempt, to put into words what God discloses of Himself. We may undertake, for example, to describe God in a long list of attributes. These we can learn and master. Yet they are only our own feeble handiwork, necessary, to be sure, but very limited in their function. Revelation has to do with getting to know God Himself. And He is always greater than any formulation concerning Him. (21)

For this reason the Biblical concept of truth rests on the person-to-person relationship established in revelation. In the Old Testament the terms emeth and emunah, almost without exception, mean reliability, faithfulness, dependability and loyalty. In the New Testament, the word aletheia retains much of this Old Testament flavor that at times—especially in John—acquires the additional idea of reality as opposed to falsehood and illusion. In no instance does it signify factual precision, as truth is usually understood today.

Jesus can, therefore, be described as saying of Himself, "I am the Truth." (John 14, 6) He did not say, "I have the truth." Least of all did He ever remark, "I have the facts at my disposal." For what He meant to indicate was that He came as the final manifestation of God's complete faithfulness. This helps to explain His other saying, "Every one who is of the truth, hears my voice." (John 18,37) Such a remark assumes a proper personal relationship to God and His Son rather than a capacity for absorbing right information.

An appreciation of the Scriptural view of truth is of considerable import for the interpreter. The Biblical documents reflect an understanding of truth as being bound to a personal relationship. What the sacred writers record and what they give their witness to is God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. They do so, moreover, from within their own personal limitations in terms of historical, geographical, or scientific information. Luther could, therefore, remark that the author of Kings was more accurate than the writer of Chronicles in his historical statements. (22) This observation, however, did not lead him to reject Chronicles as unworthy of being included among the canonical books. When he voiced a criticism of a particular document—as in the case of Esther or James—he did so only on the grounds that neither book spoke of Christ.

It would be folly to accept the zoological or biological information contained in Leviticus, let us say, as scientifically accurate in a present-day sense. Again it is no perversion of Biblical truth to realize that Jude's attribution of a quotation from the Book of Enoch to Enoch himself, "the seventh from Adam, " is not intended to bind us in terms of fact. As far as Jude's information went this was a correct statement to make. Today we are sure that the Book of Enoch dates from somewhere between 200 to 50 B.C., and that Jude's reference is to this book. Or take another case. At one point the evangelist Matthew ascribes a quotation from Zechariah to Jeremiah. In his Exposition of the Prophet Zechariah, Luther observes at this point that the evangelist made a mistake in his facts but that he got the heart of the matter despite this inaccuracy. (23) In saying this Luther was mindful of the intent of Scripture, which is to make us "wise unto salvation. " That is its only function. It was not created to provide information on all kinds of assorted subjects, independent of God's plan of salvation.

A concern for truth in the sense of factual accuracy is a phenomenon peculiar to modern Western culture, especially since the Age of the Enlightenment. It is unknown to this day in many other parts of the world. The introductory comments on the book of Daniel in the Interpreter's Bible make a point of this as they consider some of the minor historical inaccuracies of this apocalyptic document. The commentator illustrates his point by an analogy from a

Situation that might develop in modern Islam. An Arab sheik, holding forth to his tribal group with a message most pertinent to contemporary problems, might present the issue as follows:

"When the first Elizabeth had been reigning ten years over the English and her rival Philip, who in reality was her husband, was ruling over Spain, the ships of the English set forth from the north of England and rediscovered America, which, as we know, had earlier been discovered by the Arabs, who had made nought of it. They were followed there closely by the ships of Spain. There was much rivalry between them and strife over its riches and wonders till they said, 'Let us be wise. America is two. Let the English take the north and the people of Spain the south.' It was so, and the people of Spain were content, but the ships of the English, ever restless came also to the lands of Islam. Then, too, following them, came their progeny who had waxed mighty in America." (24)

Now, there are all kinds of factual discrepancies in this statement; and yet it embodies the truth intended to be communicated by the sheik from within his culture. He did not propose to inculcate exact historical information at this point. He was interested in propounding an interpretation of a certain problem in international relations as this affected the lives and fortunes of his tribe.

Similarly, the book of Daniel proposes to teach God's faithfulness to His promises. To stress that Jerusalem was captured, not in the third year of Jehoiakim (606 B. C.) but of Jehoiachin (597 B. C.); that Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus and not of Nebuchadrezzar, and that he was never a king; that "satrap" was not a Babylonian but a Persian title—to get lost in a discussion of such matters is to miss the whole point of the books.

In the Scriptural sense truth is practically synonymous with revelation. Neither term has to do primarily with the inculcation or acquisition of information; neither concept suggests chiefly the transmission and acceptance of information as such. Both are used to God's own self-disclosure. Hence the books of the Old Testament that we call historical are described as "the earlier prophets" in the Jewish canon, for the history they record is not that of the people of Israel but of God's dealings with His people. This alone is a reminder of the distance we have come from the idea of revelation which scholasticism devised and imposed with various modifications on the church for many centuries as consisting of the supernatural and infallible communication of propositional truths.

In this connection it might be well to devote a moment to the discussion of the term "inerrancy." This has become something of a shibboleth to provide a device for determining a person's general attitude toward the Scriptures. It is a term that bulked very large in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of a few decades ago. In fact, the inerrancy of Scripture constituted the last and fifth point to be dealt with in the twelve-volume series known as the Fundamentals, which originally appeared around 1910. The term is still used as a kind of hallmark of fundamentalistic Biblical scholarship.

The time has come to insist that the word "inerrancy" is inappropriately used of the Scriptures. In the first place, it obscures the nature of Biblical revelation; for it is a term used on the level of observation and factual precision. But this notion of truth is not found in the Scriptures. Moreover, using the term "inerrancy" suggests that the primary concern of the Bible is to furnish information of some sort or another. If the Scriptures were a collection of truths rather than a recorded testimony to the Truth of God Himself, there might be some

justification for the use of this term. As the case for revelation now stands, any use of the term is at best misleading.

The proper Biblical concept for this aspect of the Scriptures is reliability. God reveals Himself as utterly dependable in keeping His promises and carrying out His will. The Scriptural documents serve as witnesses to this revelation. They must, therefore, be understood as reliable within the framework of the single function of the Bible, which is to "make us wise unto salvation." There can be little doubt of the fact that the sacred documents under discussion, as well as the decisions on their canonicity, imply and assume the complete faithfulness of their respective authors as witnesses to the saving events recorded there.

There are specific contexts in church life, such as vows of ordination, in which the adjective "infallible" occurs as an attribute of the Scriptures. A Lutheran pastor, for example, is expected to use the Scriptures as the only "infallible rule of faith and practice." In fact, this is part of his vow when he enters the ministry. The very limitation indicated by the combination "faith and practice" suggests that the Scriptures do not deceive the reader and user, that they are a dependable guide in faith and life. This is quite something different from insisting that every piece of information given in the Bible is factually accurate in our contemporary sense.

The Biblical revelation itself insists that it is bound to specific moments in history. This historical particularity is of the very essence of God's ways in disclosing Himself. The very limitations of the individual authors in terms of language, geographical, historical, and literary knowledge testify to the specifics of divine revelation. This is part of the "scandal" of the Bible. An insistence on its "inerrancy" is often an attempt to remove this obstacle. The use of the term almost invariably results in a docetic view of the Bible and so tends to overlook the fact that our Sacred Scriptures are both divine and human documents.

II. The Means of Revelation

We have now established that in the Biblical view revelation is an "opening of the door from within, without waiting for the knock from outside." (25) Without this presupposition the Scriptures remain a closed book. For it is the Living God to whom the Bible introduces us. Now we must proceed to a discussion of the means God has employed to reveal Himself to men. These deserve a fuller treatment than the occasional references made to them in our previous description of the concept of revelation.

As already indicated in our first section, one of the terms most frequently used in the language of revelation is "the word of God." This concept occurs in the Old Testament as dabhar in some combination or other no less than four hundred times. Now, dabhar does not

mean word only; it is frequently used of God's acts. In fact, the whole distinction between logos and ergon, between word and work, is a Greek idea, which is not reflected in Biblical usage. Even in John's Gospel doing and saying occur as practically synonymous, as, for example, in 8, 28, "... I do nothing on my own but speak thus as the Father taught me." The expression "word of God" is used with particular reference to those acts of God by which He manifested His redemptive power. These revelatory events are charged with all the characteristics of God Himself and convey God to men as the recipients and beneficiaries of such communication.

These mighty acts of God are occasionally referred to as tehiloth in the Hebrew and as aretai in Greek. They are of such a nature as to reveal the "mighty arm of God" at work to

liberate and to redeem. A typical series of such divine interventions is described in Psalm 78. Very significantly the very mention of the deeds of the Lord is called teaching, pointing up the pedagogical significance of the fact that the doctrine of Scripture is derived from a response to and reflection upon God's acts. Biblical theology is basically recital theology. (26)

In the Old Testament the greatest of all of God's "Words" was the Exodus. This was the divinely creative, dabhar by which Israel became God's community. From then on God's "Words" came to men within the life and experience of this people, and the record of them developed in Israel as God's "kingdom of priests." The Exile and particularly the return from Babylon were further acts of revelation. Behind both of these, in terms of chronology, stood the creation of the universe. In the New Testament it is the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and particularly the Resurrection (including the Ascension and the Session) that rank as the mightiest of God's acts. These, too, were recorded and witnessed to by persons of the new community, the church. In a very real sense, therefore, we must think of our Scriptures as the book of the people of God, created within the worshipping community of both testaments. (27)

God and by themselves the great occurrences recorded in Scripture meant nothing much. To be sure, the Egyptians are described as having been able to conclude from Israel's escape that Yahweh was the Lord. (28) But in this case such an insight remained without redemptive significance. Hence God raised up individuals who were given special illumination, sometimes called inspiration in contemporary theology, so that they might see the theological significance of, let us say, the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, or of Israel's return from captivity. By being so interpreted these historic occasions became events. That is to say, they were creative occurrences producing desired effects.

Now, a very unique feature of the Biblical revelation is this that the "Words of God," His mighty acts, must always be understood in their particular setting within history. Revelation does not consist in unveiling timeless truths. God did not hurl His absolutes out into the universe at random. On the contrary, the manifestations He gave of Himself and of His will are bound to specific historical contexts. They are pegged down in terms of time and locale. In this way they have been woven into the very fabric of history. This is one reason they come down to us as relevant events: They are part of the background that we have inherited and that helps to make our life meaningful. What is even more noteworthy is that they are acts of God experienced within a community that enjoys an abiding historical continuity in consequence of God's redemptive activity. (29)

To illustrate the significance of historical particularity for revelation, we might take the case of John the Baptist. His activities, his words and even his dress served as instruments of revelation. The last chapters of Isaiah had sounded out the good news that God would reign. Malachi had ended his prophecies with a reference to the return of Elijah before the coming of the great day of the Lord. These two ideas joined forces in the development of Israel's thoughtlife to create the image of the Messenger (mebaseer) who would precede the Messiah. To fulfill this expectation, John the Baptist came into the desert of Judea, dressed like Elijah, and appropriating to himself and his task those words from Isaiah 40 which spoke of Israel's return from captivity. Here we have factual rather than verbal revelation. Whatever words John spoke were uttered to interpret his own coming in terms of the returning remnant. His very appearance in the desert of Judea was a way of saying that the time for creating a new people of God had come.

Here, incidentally, we confront the phenomenon of recapitulation, a subject to which Irenaeus was the first in the history of the church to devote a great deal of formal discussion. Strictly speaking, history does not repeat itself. In this respect it is unlike nature with its recurrence of seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. Hence it is not possible to define an historic event. It belongs to no class of things. It is sui generis. In history, therefore, we have to be content with description. Despite this fact, however, God used several variations of certain recurring themes in the work of revealing Himself to men. The recurrence of previous patterns in divine intervention was a hallmark of genuineness in later redemptive events.

The whole cluster of events surrounding Israel's exodus became a type of future divine interventions, Israel was liberated at the Red Sea, baptized in its waters, as St. Paul puts it. In its wake there were to follow other acts of redemption. When the time for gathering a new people of God had come, John appeared in the desert, baptizing with water. His coming was interpreted to be a new exodus as seen in the light of Israel's later return from Babylon.

Israel had eaten manna in the desert. In remembering this past miracle at their festivals, God's people looked forward to a time when the Lord would again do such a sign. Jesus, therefore, fed the five thousand and the four thousand in the desert, in this way revealing Himself as the Messiah and indicating that the Messianic age had come in fulfillment of expectations born of previous experiences with the God of promise. In the sixth chapter of his Gospel, the evangelist John goes to great lengths in spelling out the nature of this recapitulation, interpreting the miracle of the loaves in terms of fulfillment rather than of mere repetition. (30)

This introduces us to a uniquely Biblical concept, the idea of fulfillment. It has to do with history, but not as a continuous linear movement. When the New Testament speaks of the fullness of time it points to a center in history, to a period when certain events took place that had meaning for all time. They had not occurred before and will not happen again. But at the same time they give meaning not only to the story of God's dealings with His own people but to the whole story of mankind. Their quality is such as to give us a clue to the meaning of history as a whole. They were decisive in their significance for all that had gone before and for all that was to follow.

For the interpreter of the Bible it is important to realize that fulfillment means more than the verbal correspondence between the description of a New Testament event and some prophetic utterance in the Old. It is much bigger than the idea of some word of prophecy coming to rest at a prescribed point and in a predicted person, although this is included. From a Biblical point of view all of the history that went into the creation and preservation of Israel as God's people centers in Jesus Christ. This is why Matthew can without further ado apply the words of Hosea, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," to the return of Jesus from Egypt. (31) The temptations that befell Israel in the desert overtook Jesus under similar surroundings. For He came as the true Israel, God's first-born, His chosen one. Moreover, He came as a new Moses and was hailed on Palm Sunday as another David. Israel had had to suffer as Yahweh's servant; in the fullness of time Jesus revealed Himself to be the suffering Servant and subsumed this destiny under His self-designation as the Son of Man.

We must add to this the observation that the person and work of Jesus embodied the experience and destiny of the New Israel, the church. He could speak of His risen body as a

temple. In a very real sense the church is both this body and this temple. Both the past and the future of God's people are described as coming to rest in Jesus Christ. This is the full significance of John 5, 39: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." On this basis we must insist that Jesus stands at the very center of time, as the fulfillment of all of God's ancient promises.

The revelation of God, therefore, occurs within history and, in fact, through history as seen from within the people of God. To this story of God's redemptive activity we sometimes apply the term Heilsgeschichte, which has been translated variously as holy history, or the history of redemption, or even saving history. Now, the Scriptures are quite explicit in their insistence that the events recorded there are not to be thought of as occurring next to history or possibly above it. On the contrary, the fabric of these occurrences, involving man's redemption, is made to a high degree of the same stuff as the rest of the history of the ancient Near East and Graeco-Roman culture. In fact, the archaeological discoveries of the last century have demonstrated the large extent to which Israel belonged to the social and cultural milieu of the total Fertile Crescent. Moreover, Luke's insistence on the precise historical context of John the Baptist's ministry, the description of Jesus' trial as having taken place under Pontius Pilate, as well as the rather detailed account we have of Paul's activities all testify to a close connection between these events and what was taking place in the world around them. None of these things happened in a corner, so to speak, but at the very crossroads of the ancient world. (32)

Yet their significance in terms of God's purposes was not understood except from within God's community. God revealed Himself only in the covenant relationship. The meaning of such events as the Babylonian exile or the activity of the early church were usually misread by such as had not come into the circle of God's truth. There was really nothing para-historical or supra-historical in the structure of these occurrences. Yet they were seen as mighty acts of God only in the light of the interpretation put on them by prophet, apostle, poet, wise man, teacher and evangelist. At the same time, God made it known to His people that the events of their own history might be used to interpret God's intent for all of history. The specific occurrences employed by God to reveal Himself and His will serve as tracer bullets, one might say, by which it is possible from within the Christian community to determine the general direction for all that is happening among men. This does not mean that any given occurrence (Dunkirk for example) can receive a definitive interpretation in the light of the events recorded and witnessed to by the Scriptures; for there is no authoritative prophetic or apostolic word on this point. Only the general quality and outcome of the historic process can be interpreted meaningfully.

At this point, we must come to grips with the problem of the resurrection. It has been argued that this cannot be considered as an historical occurrence for the reason that it cannot be validated by any principles of historiography. Because of its extraordinary nature, others have called it a supra-historical event, in the sense that it took place at a point where man's time and God's time intersect. Be that as it may, when viewed from within the Christian community, there can be no question as to the historical nature of the resurrection. To this end the apostle Paul introduces the names and numbers of a series of witnesses who had themselves seen the risen Lord, some of whom were still alive and available for their testimony when he wrote the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Moreover, the evangelists refer to the empty tomb in such a way as to suggest an apologetic concern. (33) To be sure, an empty grave might be explained in other ways. In fact, it has received other interpretations, but none of them fully explain how it was possible for this particular tomb to be empty under the circumstances described except as the result of a rising from the dead.

The accounts that we have of this event leave us in no doubt whatsoever that they were written to testify not to a noble figment of excited imaginations but to an actual occurrence. The burden of this testimony is not that there is no death but that it has been overcome by one who entered the context of our history and subsequently rose above it.

Does the fact that this testimony comes from within the community of God's people impugn the historical character of the resurrection as an event? No more than the quasi-religious language of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address invalidates an historian's factual account of the birth of our nation. The historiographer may feel quite certain that his outside or "objective" approach is the only valid one. In terms of his particular methodology, he may be quite right. However, any insistence that there is no other interpretation of an occurrence than his own may deprive the historian of the privilege and thrill of confronting an event rather than analyzing a happening. (34) The signing of the Declaration of Independence must be described and understood not only as an incident. It was an event because of the effect it had on the people of a new nation. Similarly, we may grant that we have no "objective" source of information on the resurrection. If we had, it could yield no more than the observation that it had occurred. Only from within the newly created relationship between God and men, which Jesus came to establish, could the resurrection take on the proportions of a divine saving event.

Before we leave the question of the connection between Heilgeschichte and history as such we must consider one other serious problem; namely, the nature of the materials given in Genesis chapters 1-11. There can be no question as to the difference between what is recorded in these early chapters and what follows with the introduction of the story of Abraham. Even the language is often different, at times being highly symbolical, as in the story of man's fall. (35)

For one thing, it is reasonably evident that we have here the language of theological interpretation. Whatever sources of information may have been available to the writer, it is fairly clear that at least the structure, if not the content, of these chapters, was determined by Israel's concern for the origin of things in the light of her own choice as God's people. We hasten to add that this does not deprive these chapters of their revelatory function. In fact, the very first two chapters of Genesis unveil God as the creator of the universe, as a person outside and above both time and space. Such a God was not known to the religions of other peoples contemporary with Israel. The account of creation is followed by an explanation of how man came under the influence of sin with its frightening consequences.

We have here the language of origins, but without the confused cosmogonies and theogonies of other religions. These early accounts were put together within the community of Israel to throw some light on the questions, Whence came the universe; and, particularly, Whence came man's corruption? We might ask, is this history? In the sense that there was an Adam and Eve, that there was an act of disobedience against God, one would need to apply affirmatively in the light of the total Biblical record. But if it is a question of applying methods of historical investigation and validation, the answer would have to be, No! This of course, does not affect the truth of the various accounts contained in these early chapters. They still report what God did as creator and lord of both nature and history, and how man responded to His Creator's claims on him.

With this observation we reach the point where we must raise the issue of the Bible's own relationship to God's means of revelation. This is in essence the question raised at the very outset; namely, In what sense is the Bible the Word of God? Strictly speaking and in a primary

sense the Scriptures are not in themselves a revelation. They are unlike the Book of Mormon, which is said to have come into being as a result of a single miraculous discovery in a hillside at Palmyra, N. Y. Our Bible is the record of God's revelatory acts. At the same time it is a witness of God's redeeming will and actions. No sacred writer ever remained uninvolved and uncommitted. No Biblical author wrote objectively or from a neutral point of view. St. Mark, for instance, did not set out to compose a life of Christ in the sense of a biography. In his book he proposed to present Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of Man, with all that this title implied. St. John did not remain a mere spectator to our Lord's suffering. He wrote of it in terms of redemptive significance and as one determined to show that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

The Biblical documents confront us, therefore, with personal testimony, with an interpretation of events. This is not without its bearing on the art of Biblical interpretation. The wording and formulations of the Scriptures almost always intend to point beyond themselves to the great events of what we have called Heilsgeschichte. (36) They cannot be handled adequately by a methodology bound to a two-dimensional approach of occurrence as mere fact. For the sacred authors worked with the language of depth, of meaning, embodying their faith in God and His Anointed. At the same time the interpreter will do well to be concerned with attempting to arrive, to the degree that this is possible, at the substratum of historical occurrence in each event recorded, if for no other reason than to observe just what kind of happenings God used and had interpreted prophetically in order to manifest Himself.

As the record of God's great acts of redemption, the Scriptures contain various forms of literature, in many respects not at all dissimilar in their terminology and structure to documents from other ancient religions. The Biblical interpreter must reckon with these similarities and, of course, also with the diversities in both form and content. For example, there are obvious similarities between the creation and flood accounts as given in Genesis and in the Babylonian myths dealing with these same themes. The Biblical interpreter will ignore the similarities only at his own peril. He will be left without a full appreciation of such places where the Old Testament baptizes the language of ancient mythology into its own use, as, for instance in Psalm 74,13.14: "Thou didst divide the sea by thy might; thou didst break the heads of the dragons on the waters. Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan..." There is nothing about dragons and Leviathan in the Genesis account. The Psalmist simply employed the language and imagery of contemporary mythology to praise God for His creative act. Here the concepts of the Psalm are those of the total cultural outlook of the ancient Near East. On the other hand, we must also insist that there is no literature outside the church quite like the four Gospels. They are sui generis, with a structure born either out of conscious imitation of the book of Exodus or out of the pattern of worship established in the early church, especially the Passover liturgy.

A single theme runs through the whole of Scriptures. What we have in these various documents is a series or cluster of witnesses to God's "good pleasure" in liberating His people. Even the ministry of our Lord is described in these terms by the evangelist John. The works that Jesus did—and not only His words—testified to the gracious will of the Father. His life was a means of revelation, and His Words were a running commentary, so to speak, on God's saving purpose. Both pointed beyond themselves to the Father. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," Jesus is quoted as saying to Philip. (John 14,9) Now, if even this life was one of witness, how much more is the record of it a witness to revelation rather than a revelation in itself?

The fourth Gospel is quite explicit in this matter. "These things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20,31) What is said here in so many

words applies to the Scriptures as a whole. They were written as a witness to the redemptive activity of God. Their purpose is to point to those events from which we know God as gracious and redeeming. The Scriptures are, in fact, the story of all that God did to set us free from every thing that spoils life. (37)

Moreover, they are our only source of information on the subject matter of our redemption. They are God's Word in the sense that they convey to us the only authoritative interpretation of God's acts. We speak of them, therefore, as inspired documents. Now, what do we mean by such a statement? And what is the connection, if any,, between inspiration and revelation?

We must note, first of all, that the English word "inspiration," as applied specifically to the Old Testament, occurs only once; namely, in II Timothy 3,16, where we read: "All Scripture is given in inspiration of God." In point of fact, however, the Greek word translated as "given by inspiration" signifies "God-breathed." And this must be distinguished very carefully from what generally passed for inspiration in those days. The passage in Timothy speaks of God-breathed documents or passages. The expression is similar to a thought associated with the creation of man in the second chapter of Genesis. We read there that God breathed into man the breath of life; and man became a living being. This certainly means that man was hereby endowed with life and creativity. In much the same sense, the Scriptures are living documents, testifying to the work of a life-giving God. Every such document came into being to create faith. (38) Each one is in some way a record of and witness to that divine revelation which confronts man with the claims of a living God.

At the same time these documents are God-breathed in the sense that God Himself took a hand in their creation. Revelation may be described as that divine action which caused the mighty acts of God to take place; inspiration may be thought of as God's action that caused the Bible to be written. We have been accustomed to limit the term inspiration to some special guidance provided by the Holy Spirit to the writers of the individual Biblical books. Whether the Timothy passage intends to suggest this limited view is very doubtful, particularly when we recall the fact that the Septuagint, a translation of the original Hebrew text, in most instances served as the Scriptures of the apostles and of the early church. It would probably be more correct to say that the theopneustos of II Timothy 3,16 refers to God's creative activity and guidance in all the factors and ingredients that went into the making of the Biblical documents. These would include oral, tradition, liturgical practice, documentary sources, and, of course, the research and investigation undertaken in the course of preparing a Biblical book, as well as the work of translation.

There can be little real doubt that the New Testament authors thought of the Old Testament as inspired. This is evident for instance, from an incidental reference to the Holy Spirit such as we find in Matthew 22,43: "How, then, does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying..." There follows a quotation from Psalm 110. However, the only New Testament book that claims inspiration for itself in so many words is the Apocalypse, at 1,10, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me... a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book... " and also at 1,3; 22,18 and 19, where the contents of this book are spoken of as "words of prophecy. " In addition, St. Paul, at least tentatively, once briefly referred to himself as having written an opinion under the influence of the Spirit (1 Cor. 7,40). The evangelists, however, never claim inspiration for themselves. (39) They possibly assume this, as the church certainly did when it began to wrestle with the question of canonicity.

One other reference needs some attention in this connection, because it is often cited in support of a view of inspiration narrowly limited to the actual composition of a book of

Scripture. This is II Peter 1, 21. which says, "No prophecy ever came into being by a man's own determination; rather, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." A careful analysis of this passage, however, will show that this being "carried along by the Holy Spirit" is not intended to refer to the writing of the prophecies, but rather to their utterance. The writer uses the same verb here that is found a few verses earlier in a description of the voice of the Father breaking into the Transfiguration event. The point of the passage is that, where prophets spoke, their words were those of God intervening in the affairs of men. To be sure, the previous verse speaks of such prophecies as written down in Scripture. They are the record of what prophets have said. In their written form they cannot be interpreted properly without the help of that Holy Spirit who caused them to be uttered in the first place. The twenty-first verse, therefore, does not actually speak of inspiration in the sense of some special guidance which was given, to the individual Biblical writers as they composed their documents but only to the speaking of prophecies.

Yet it would seem that this passage from Second Peter is useful for our understanding of inspiration as it relates to revelation. In the first place, it is a reminder that these are not the same. God reveals Himself primarily in His actions. These, however, would neither be fully understood nor even known were it not for a prophetic explanation and a written account of both occurrence and interpretation. (40) To provide such a written source of information God used men who came under the special influence of His Spirit for the purpose of providing an oral interpretation of and witness to an event and then to compose a written record of the occurrence and God's intended purpose. We might apply the adjective "concurrent" to the activity of the Spirit in the process of inspiration. This term would suggest that the Spirit acted in and through the writers in such a way as to make their thinking and writing both free and spontaneous and also elicited and controlled. What these men wrote was not only their own work but also that of the Spirit. In this sense, then, the Scriptures are the inspired account of God's revelatory activity. This means that the Scriptures themselves are not a revelation, but a medium of revelation, whereby we today are brought into contact with God's redeeming acts in their claim on us.

For an appreciation of the relationship between revelation and inspiration Acts 10,34 is useful. There the apostle Peter is reported as saying, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." Luke has recorded this as part of his inspired account. The formulation is given as Peter's, as his verbalization of the significance of the vision he had had in Joppa and his meeting with Cornelius. The vision was the revelatum. Some words accompanied the vision, but not the ones recorded here. God's act of having Peter see a vision is interpreted and formulated by the apostle. Both are recorded by Luke. From this we can get some idea as to how the Bible is God's Word.

But preaching in God's Word, too! In fact, in the normal course of things, as Karl Barth has pointed out many times, men are brought into contact with God's revelation of Himself by the oral proclamation or presentation of God's Good News. That is to say, the news of God's mighty liberating acts comes to men from within the Christian community by the church's preaching and teaching.

No so long ago theologians attempted to draw a sharp line of distinction between kerygma and didache. That fad has passed, mostly because the difference between the work of proclamation and the task of teaching is not fully sustained by the New Testament. In both, as well as in the administration of the Sacraments, God is at work confronting men with Himself. In a way, therefore, we can also think of these activities as Word of God. Of course, whatever doctrine

there is, must be of the kind that points beyond itself as a witness to the mighty acts of God. Formulation is not revelation; and revelation is more than information. Revelation is event in the sense that it is God at work offering Himself in communion through those actions that are recorded by and witnessed to by prophets, apostles, poets, wise men and evangelists.

The teaching of these sacred writers is the only authoritative source for any kind of proclamation and formulation of doctrine. The office of apostle, in particular, is thought of by the New Testament as a unique, unrepeatable extension of the Lord's own ministry of witness to His Father's grace and love. It took the church some decades to apply this insight. But in her conflict with heresies and divisions she was forced to recognize a difference between apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition. The former, the church began to insist, exercised and imposed an authority which the latter lacked. In time therefore, the church spoke of herself as apostolic. By this she understood that she was bound by the teaching of the apostolic tradition. [\(41\)](#)

The function of doctrine in the church today is that of formulating the Good News of God's rule in such a way as to speak relevantly to our age. For this reason doctrinal statements must come under constant scrutiny lest they obscure rather than clarify God's revelation of Himself. The church's doctrine must point beyond itself by way of the Scriptures to the redemptive activity behind the record. When so formulated, doctrine, too, may be spoken of as Word of God; for in such teaching God Himself is at work confronting the individual with His grace.

The authoritative documents for the church's teaching are those found in our Scriptures. Their testimony is a single one. Hence the word "doctrine" occurs only in the singular, except where reference is made to teachings other than that of God. This is striking confirmation of the fact that in revelation God discloses Himself and not just all kinds of assorted information about divine things. There are no doctrines of God; there is only doctrine.

The Scriptures are the written source for this doctrine. For this reason there is no task more urgent and significant for Christian life than that of Biblical interpretation. This must be undertaken with all the intellectual skill and spiritual acumen with which the individual interpreter of Scripture is endowed.

In this connection a word is in order on the subject of general revelation as distinct from the special self-disclosure of God recorded in the Scriptures. Is there a way of knowing God apart from the acts of revelation described and interpreted for us in the Biblical account? This is a question we must consider next.

We must hasten to observe that this is not the same issue as the question regarding natural theology; for the latter concept disintegrated with the growing awareness that revelation has to do with disclosure rather than discovery. The problem of natural theology can arise only where revelation is still thought of as a process of transmitting a body of information, and where the scholastic distinction between morality and religion is retained.

The matter of general revelation is raised in the light of such passages as Psalm 19,1-5 and Romans 1,19.20. These texts are often adduced to support the contention, particularly strong in Archbishop Temple's works, that God discloses Himself also in nature and history generally viewed. It is very doubtful, however, whether this is the intent of the Scripture passages cited. It is quite unlikely that Psalm 19 was intended to suggest a revelation apart from the Torah described in the latter portion of the Psalm. As E. F. Scott has put it: "The

Psalmist never doubted the existence of God, and requires no proof of it... His mood is one of sheer rapture, and this is always the mood of those Hebrew poets. They do not argue from nature, but exult in it..." (42)

The passage from the first chapter of Romans, moreover, would seem to suggest less that God disclosed Himself in the works of creation and more that man is so constructed as to make inferences from nature as to the existence and power of God. That is to say, man can, by reflection, by his intellect, obtain certain information about "the invisible things of God." This, however, is more a matter of discovery on man's part and less a disclosure of God Himself. Much the same would apply to St. Paul's remarks made at Lycaonia (Acts 14,17). There he suggested that by the blessings of rain and plentiful crops God had not left Himself without a witness.

These passages suggest that man can arrive at and acquire certain bits of information about God and his existence in nature and within history. His abilities enable him to understand his own nature and status better. There are also certain inferences he can draw with respect to God. But they provide no access to God Himself. It is best, therefore, to think of general revelation as including such matters as a universal feeling of a need to worship, the concern with social order, an interest in organization, the faculty for language. (43) All of these things tend to remind man himself of his creatureliness and dependence on divine providence. There is here no confrontation with God Himself, especially not in His redemptive purposes.

III. Content and Purpose of Revelation

We have indicated again and again that the content of the Biblical revelation is God Himself in His redemptive activity. We might put this another way and say that the Bible is the record of those events which unfold God's gracious favor. The New Testament uses the term *eudokia* for this concept of God's good pleasure. From the frequent use of this term we would have to conclude that an interpretation of any given text is made "according to the Scriptures" when the passage under discussion is brought into relationship with the unifying theme of Scripture as the story of God's dealing with His people. (44) In fact, it is this particular awareness of God's "good favor" that provides the prophetic thrust of the history given in the Scriptures. (45) This is what removes ambivalence from the individual occurrences recorded and gives them meaning, thus creating history.

The continuity of this account may be observed in the Scriptural use of the concept "inheritance," which is used to carry forward the thought of God's promises, until they are fulfilled and even until they are brought to their consummation at the end of time. These promises become articulate particularly at the time of Abraham.

Before the patriarch's name was changed, while he still was known as Abram, he was given the assurance (Gen 12,5) that he would inherit the land of Canaan. This promise was expanded when he was given the name of Abraham (Gen. 17) and especially after he had demonstrated his obedience to God by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. To the original promise was added the statement that in Abraham's seed all the nations would be blessed. From there the story gradually unfolds. Abraham's descendants conquer Canaan under Joshua. This particular land becomes Israel's *nachalah* (inheritance). God's early word to Abraham is fulfilled. In time the expansion of the original promise comes into its own. The prophets turn the concept of Israel's inheritance into an eschatological hope. They speak of a new age, when a highway will run from Egypt through Canaan to Assyria, and

Israel's ancient enemies will join her in the worship of the true God. (46) These words of the Lord begin to be fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus and especially with the creation of the church. This new Israel also has its Canaan to conquer, under a new Joshua (Jesus). It has the task once committed to God's ancient people: to extend the borders of His kingdom until the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

This inheritance is described in Matthew 24, 34 as something God had decided on before history began. We shall reach it when history ends. What lies in between is the story of God's "good pleasure" as an implicate of history. As such it is recorded and witnessed to in the Scriptures, which, in the words of Emil Brunner, describes "the parabola of redemption. " This is the content of Biblical revelation.

The Scriptures also use the word "glory" (doxa) to refer to the content of revelation. The term is often intimately associated with our Lord's return, the parousia. In this kind of context apokalypsis signifies the final unveiling of God in His full splendor. Doxa, however, is also used of the veiled glory of God's presence among His people. It is the word used in the Septuagint for the Hebrew shekinah, the cloud of God's presence. It applies to the hidden splendor of our Lord's ministry, of which the evangelist observes, "We saw His glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father; full of grace and truth" (John 1,14). This presence of God continues in the church by the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. These constitute the place of God's glory, the means by which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself as the down-payment (arrabon) of that fuller splendor of which we have been assured. Once again, the content of revelation turns out to be God Himself.

We must mention the word mystery in this connection. In its Old Testament environment the word may have referred to heavenly councils of angels assembles at the request of the Lord to hear His decisions. This is quite possibly what Amos had in mind when he spoke of the mysteries of God being revealed to the prophets (Amos 3). He uses the term to suggest that somehow the prophets were given the privilege of having listened in on the proceedings of these heavenly assemblies.

"Mystery" is a word of revelation, but in a different sense from our term "secret." Once a secret is revealed among men, it is no longer a secret. In the Scriptures, however, God is a self-disclosing mystery in the sense that as He unveils Himself He does so by hiding Himself, especially in the lowly form of the Suffering Servant. At some points Christ Himself is spoken of as this mystery. In one context Paul speaks of the incorporation of the Gentiles as the mystery hidden from previous ages but revealed in the New Testament age. But even as this mystery of God's action toward the Gentiles is unveiled it remains hidden. It is really without explanation except as a creative act of God, a divine dabhar, the forward thrust of His ancient Exodus word.

The Scriptures do not leave us in any doubt whatsoever as to the purpose of revelation. In revelation God offers us Himself in fellowship. When men accept this offer, the experience is called "salvation" (soteria). This term, like its twin, "redemption!" (apolutrosis), is another concept used by the Scriptures to indicate the content of revelation. As such, it embodies the whole account of God's mighty acts done to set us free from sin and death. Where these enemies of mankind have been overcome there is life (Zoe). This life was made manifest particularly in Jesus Christ, of whom the prologue to the Gospel according to St. John says in so many words, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (1,4). He was and is life not because He assured men that there is no death but because He overcame death. Revelation is event and not just words.

In disclosing Himself, God is seen as intent on reestablishing His rule over and among men. The New Testament phrase for this is the "kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven." Now, although this precise expression does not occur in the Old Testament, as an historical reality, the idea goes back to the time of Mt. Sinai, where God chose a lowly race of slaves to be His "kingdom of priests,"

God intervened in history at this point to create for Himself a community that would serve and honor Him. Among this people He chose to dwell; here His will was to rule supreme. Moreover, Israel was to serve as the instrument for extending the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth. This was the essence of the covenant Yahweh made with Israel, unilaterally and in grace. Israel was sure that the Lord had revealed Himself in the mighty act of liberation known as the Exodus. His will was made known from Mt. Sinai. The terms of the covenant were offered; and this people responded with the promise, "we will obey!"

Obtaining this reaction of obedience closes the circle of effectual revelation. In any act of self-disclosure God intends to break through to create the response of faith, A word of God. therefore, cannot be thought of apart from God's purpose of communication. Such a word does not really exist in a vacuum. God does not talk to Himself. By its very nature a word, an action of His, has to do with a person-to-person relationship created between Him and us.

The Exodus was God's great dabhar of choosing a community for service and obedience. To be sure, Israel soon grumbled and even rebelled. This does not detract, however, from the fact that as He acted in redemption God had in mind the reestablishment of His rule over and among men.

In time, only a remnant in Israel lived in faith and obedience. Then God began to identify Himself in His saving purposes with this minority group. In the fullness of time the true Israel, Jesus the Christ, was born among the members of this remnant. When He entered His public ministry, He at once began to proclaim the presence of God's rule in His own person. He gathered the true around Himself and promised to make these disciples His church, to create a new Israel, with the Twelve disciples as the patriarchs of a new people of God. Jesus, then, is God's greatest dabhar, His mightiest act.

The individuals gathered around Jesus were known as His disciples. They had not chosen Him; He had selected them. In this respect Jesus was not like other rabbis, even though He was at times called "teacher." Those who followed Him did so not on their own initiative but because they had been called out of Israel to serve as the nucleus of a new community.

The church was to be a new phenomenon, the fulfillment of Jeremiah's vision that the days would come when God would arrange for a new covenant, a time of forgiveness, an age when God's spirit would dwell in the hearts of men. The revelation recorded for us in the Scriptures has this development in mind from the beginning: a redeemed community gathered in the presence of God, who by a mighty dabhar has brought it into being. From the outset God's acts carried this forward thrust. There is even now an open future for His people. The days of fulfillment are come, to be sure. But we now await the consummation in God's good time.

In the meantime, God's revelation has called us to a transformed life within His community—a life of forgiveness, patience, longsuffering subjection, humility, unity and love.

In the very life of the church God is at work; for it, too, is the product of His mighty acts.

In a very real sense, the church is God's dabhar, unveiling before men a quality of life unknown apart from God's gracious favor. Among this people, God is active in His audible and visible Word, revealing Himself as a God who would have all men not only to see but to perceive, not only to hear but especially to obey.

NOTES

1. [^](#) Lutheran Cyclopedia (1954), p. 513.
2. [^](#) As for instance R. Rothe did in his Dogmatik of 1863, p. 238.
3. [^](#) A quotation from A. Piper's God in History (p. 153) seems apropos to this point: "At a time, for example, when the Protestant church had practically forgotten that the Lord Himself leads His church into all truth, and when those who still clung to the truth indulged in the worship of the letter of the Bible, God allowed higher criticism to unmask the arbitrariness in this practice and to refute the theories which were meant to justify it." '
4. [^](#) In this connection note the article "Luther on the Word of God" in The Minnesota Lutheran, November 1958, pp. 16-25, which is a district essay read by Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan.
5. [^](#) Cf. John Baillie, The Idea of Revelation, pp. 22-24.
6. [^](#) Cf. 1 Corinthians 13,12 and Galatians 4,9,
7. [^](#) Jeremiah 23, 28.
8. [^](#) Cf. Exodus 33, 23.
9. [^](#) Joshua 24,6: "Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea..." Note also the Passover Haggadah as discussed from this point of view in W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, pp. 102ff. Note further David Daube's application of the Haggadah form to Mark 12,1-34 in NTS, 5,174-187.
10. [^](#) A.J. Heschel, Essays Presented to Leo Baeck, p. 29.
11. [^](#) Cf. 1 Samuel 9.
12. [^](#) Cf. Genesis 32,32.
13. [^](#) Cf. Isaiah 52, 7.
14. [^](#) Cf. Mark 1,14.
15. [^](#) The full discussion is. given under the term kalupto in vol. III, pp., 563-597. The particular sentence quoted here occurs on page 575.
16. [^](#) Cf. Oepke, KTHW, in, p. 596: "Die Selbstdarbietung des Vaters Jesu Christi zur Gemeinschaft."
17. [^](#) Thomas covers this matter in Part I of the Summa. His answer to question 1, for example, says, "Necessarium fuit, praeter philosophicas disciplinas, quae per rationem investigantur, sacram doctrinam per revelationem haberi." (italics mine).

18. [^](#) This is certainly the significance of Luther's criterion that the revelatory quality of each part of the Bible is to be judged according to the measure in which it "Christum treibet."
19. [^](#) Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 13: "But our historical revelativism affirms the historicity of the subject even more than that of the object; man is not only in time, but time is in man..."
20. [^](#) Cf. John Baillie, op. cit., p. 21.
21. [^](#) Cf. Emil Brunner, Offenbarung und Vernunft, p. 25.
22. [^](#) Weimar Ausgabe, Tischreden, I, 364. The whole statement reads: "The writer of Chronicles noted only the summary and chief stories and events. Whatever is less important and immaterial he passed by. For this reason the books of Kings are more credible than the Chronicles. (Transl. in Reu, Luther and the Scriptures, p. 72.)
23. [^](#) WA, 23, 642, 23ff.: "Matthew does not have the correct name... What does it matter if he does not give the name exactly, because more depends on the words than on the name..." (Reu, Luther and the Scriptures, p. 88.)
24. [^](#) Vol. VI, p. 345.
25. [^](#) E.C. Blackman, Biblical Interpretation, p. 25.
26. [^](#) Cf. the subtitle to G. Ernest Wright's The God Who Acts. Note here Micah 6,4-5: "O my people, remember... what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the the saving acts of the Lord."— On the unity of word and work note J. D. A. Macnicol's remark, "God's fiat and His effective action are one, " in Word and Deed in the OT," Scottish Journal of Theology, V, 3 (Sept. 52), p. 247.
27. [^](#) "The priestly source uses the term 'ed, stressing the liturgical nature of the Israelite community." Carroll Stuhlmueller, "The Influence of Oral Tradition Upon Exegesis" in CBQ, July 1958, p. 310, footnote.
28. [^](#) Cf. Exodus 14,18: "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh..."
29. [^](#) In this connection it should be noted that the Gnostic heresy consisted partly of a massive attempt to cut Christianity loose from its moorings in history.
30. [^](#) L. S. Thornton, Revelation and the Modern World, p. 139, lists the following three aspects of recapitulation: 1) repetition of events; 2) unity of process; 3) repetition of process.
31. [^](#) Matthew 2,15.

32. [^] "Goethe used the metaphor of the, 'roaring loom of time' on which the Time-Spirit weaves the garment by which God is made visible. Our aim should be to learn as much as we can of the very shape and texture of that garment, as it was woven by Hebrew hands and minds. For this is what gives the peculiar quality of the 'revelation' constituted by the Old Testament." H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation, p. 63. — It may be helpful in this connection to add a statement from John McIntyre's The Christian Doctrine of History, p. 6: "... Our generation has found historical thought to be one of the most intelligible vehicles of the Christian faith."

33. [^] Cf. Erik Sjoeborg, ZNW, 1957, "Das offene Grab."

34. [^] F. W. Maitland's oft-quoted dictum: "The essential matter of history is not what happened but what people thought and said about it." This is given in Baillie, op. cit., p. 67.—On event Martin Buber remarks in Moses, p. 16: "Here history cannot be dis severed from the historical wonder; but the experience which has been transmitted to us, the experience of event as wonder (italics mine), is itself great history and must be understood out of the element of history; it has to be fitted in the framework of the historical."

35. [^] For example, there is no reference to the devil in chapter 3 of Genesis: only the serpent is mentioned. We interpret this to represent the devil, because the serpent was a symbol of evil in all the cultures of the Near East, including Israel. Later Bible passages, of course, help us here.

36. [^] "Revelation is an event that destroys death, not a doctrine that death does not exist." Bultman, Der Begriff der Offenbarung im NT, p. 22, note 5. -- "For the record itself is not itself revelation; it is the record, set down by men in the illumination supplied by their knowledge of God, of the facts wherein the revelation was given." William Temple in Revelation, p. 91, as edited by John Baillie the Hugh Martin (Macmillan, 1937). Cf. Romans 3,21.

37. [^] J. A. Allan, Galatians (Torch Series), p. 54.

38. [^] In fact Bengel describes theopneustos in just this way as he discusses 2 Timothy 3,16 in his Gnomon: Divinitus, inspirata est non solum dum scripta est, Deo spirante per scriptores; sed etiam, dum legitur, Deo spirante per scripturam, et scriptura Ipsum spirante. Hinc ea tam utilis."

39. [^] That this posed a problem early in the church's history can be seen from the fact that a few of the Old Latin manuscripts add "et spiritui sancto" to Luke's statement (1,3) that it seemed too good to him to compose a Gospel account.

40. [^] This is certainly the force of en in both Romans 1,2 and Hebrews 1,1. Much the same might be said of the dia in Romans 15,26, although, of course, this doxology presents special textual problems.

41. [^] Cf. Oscar Cullmann's treatment of the distinction between apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition in The Early Church, pp. 59-99.

42. [^] The NT plea of Revelation, p. 39.
43. [^] Cf. H. P. Owen, "The Scope of Natural Revelation, " NTS, 5,2, 133-143. Also O.A. Piper, God in History, p. 66.
44. [^] Cf. Hermann Diem, Was Heisst Schriftgemaess?, Neukirchen 1958, p. 20: "...die Geschichte der Selbsterschliessung Gottes in seiner Offenbarung, in der sich sein Ratschluss verwirklicht."
45. [^] "It is prophecy that makes history." John McIntyre, The Christian Doctrine of History, p. 19.
46. [^] Isaiah 19,23.

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